The New Criterion

April 1991

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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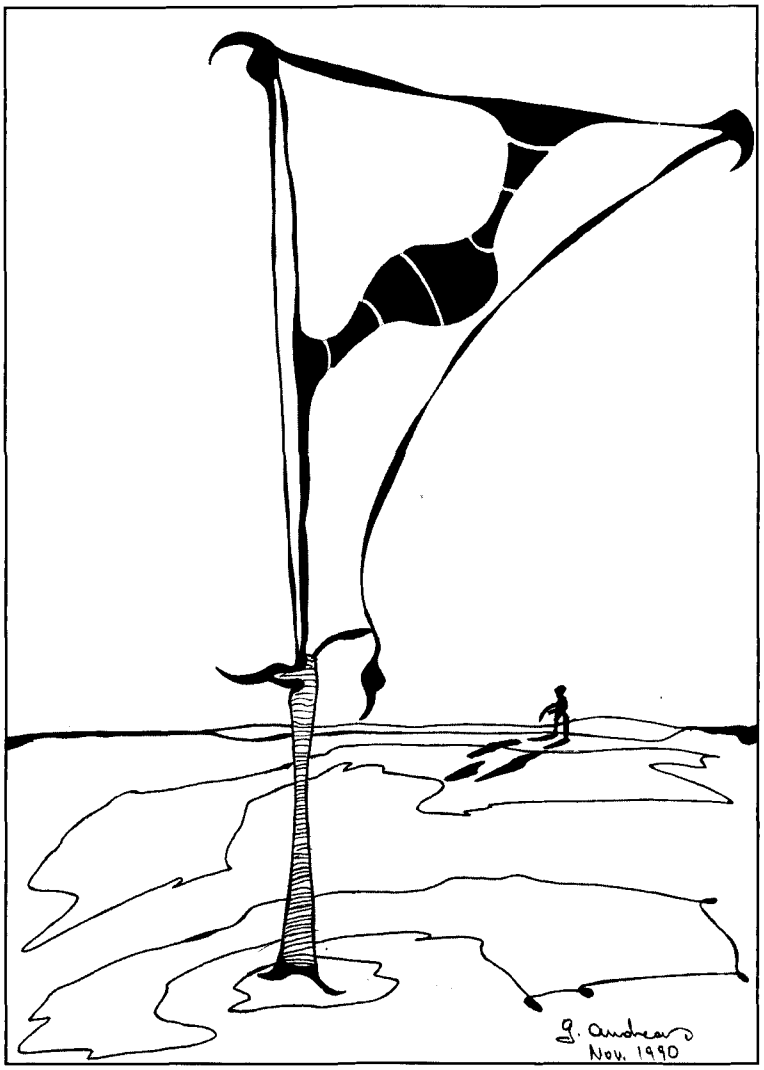

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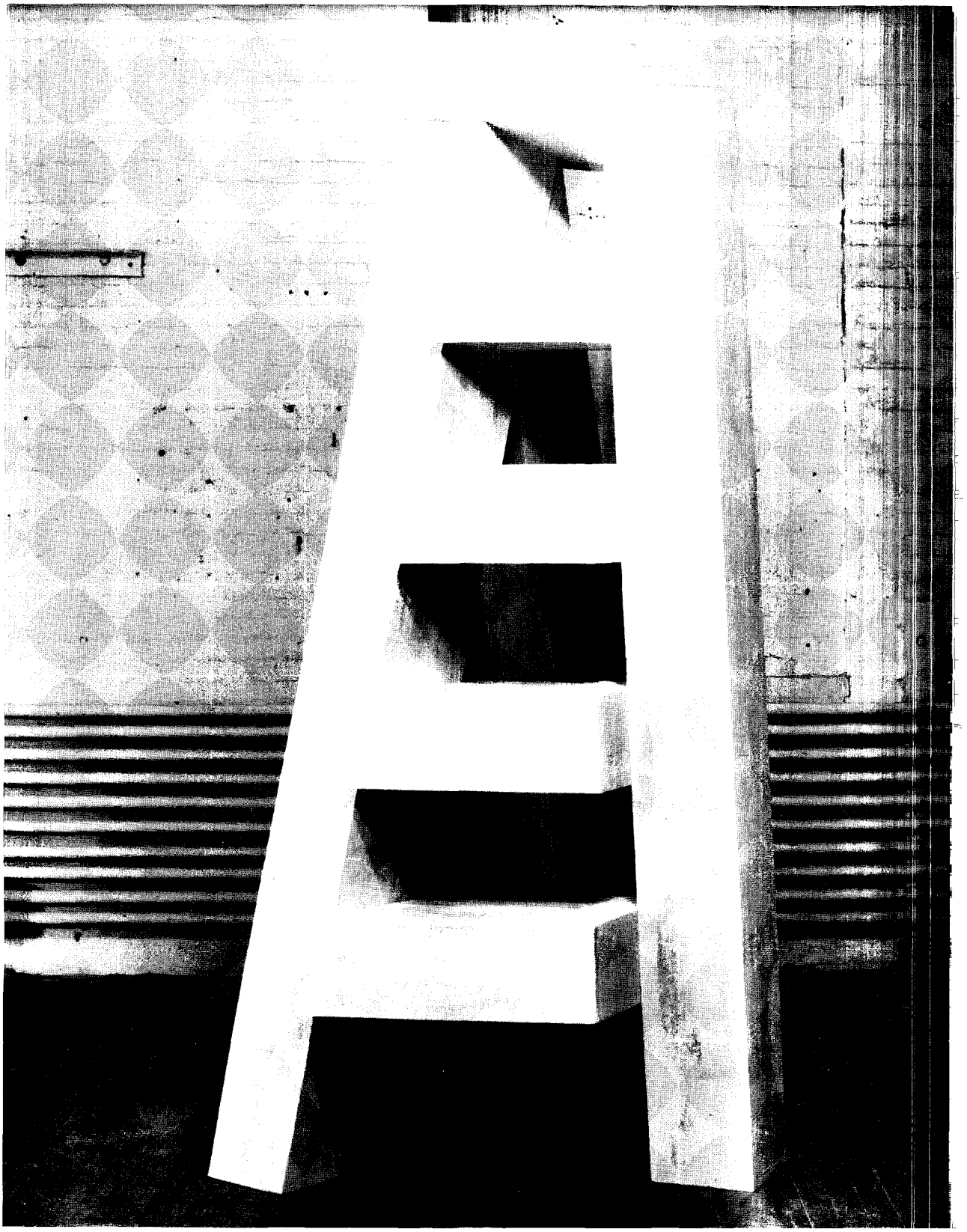

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The New Criterion *April 1991*

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Christopher Carduff reviewed Jonathan Cott's *Wandering Ghost* for our March issue.

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Roger Kimball's book, *Tenured Radicals*, is now available in paperback from Harper-Perennial.

Ruth Limmer's essay will appear, in a longer version, in *Poets, Poetics & Politics*, a forthcoming selection from the letters of Rolfe Humphries (University Press of Kansas).

Samuel Lipman's new essay collection, *Arguing for Music, Arguing for Culture*, is published by David R. Godine.

Donald Lyons is the regular theater critic for *The New Criterion*.

Walter McDonald is the author of *Night Landings* (HarperCollins).

Jeffrey Meyers's biography of Joseph Conrad is out this month from Charles Scribner's Sons.

Jed Perl's art chronicle, *Gallery Going: Four Seasons in the Art World*, will be published next month by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Robert Richman is the editor of *The Direction of Poetry*, published by Houghton Mifflin.

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MONDRIAN FLOWERS
IN AMERICAN COLLECTIONS

SIDNEY JANIS GALLERY NEW YORK APRIL

MODERN ART MUSEUM OF FORT WORTH JUNE

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Notes & Comments: April 1991

The NEA goes multicultural

Two communications from the National Endowment for the Arts, that graveyard of once-fond hopes for the support of high culture, have recently arrived at the offices of *The New Criterion*. Each has something important to tell us about the state of our governmental cultural policy in this age of multiculturalism.

The first communication, signed by Brian O'Doherty—director of the NEA's Media Arts program, the division of the agency that funds film, radio, and television—was an announcement of outstanding February arts events on PBS and public radio. Twenty programs, five of them on television and fifteen on radio, were honored by inclusion in the announcement. The five television events were "The Colored Museum," described as "George C. Wolfe's powerful, funny, and controversial comedy about black racial stereotypes"; "The Alvin Ailey Dance Theater: Steps Ahead," featuring "Ailey's 'For Bird—With Love,' the late choreographer's homage to Jazz legend Charlie Parker"; "Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker," in which "Musicians Dizzy Gillespie, Count Basie, Jimmy Dorsey and Thelonius Monk also appear in clips" and "talk about Bird's music, his fatal addiction and his lasting impact on Jazz Music"; Peter Sellars's production of *Così fan tutte* (discussed elsewhere in this issue of *The New Criterion*); and David Mamet's adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. This, according to the NEA's bulletin, was PBS's February coverage of the arts: one film about America's racial situation, two jazz-related programs, a degraded Mozart production set in a Westchester diner, and a production of Chekhov.

The story was much the same on public radio. Of the fifteen programs cited, four were installments of "Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz," a platform for assorted jazz performers and groups; four were installments of "Bluesstage," a series devoted to blues performers, including, in February, Bo Diddley; and four were installments of "Afropop Worldwide," which this month featured Afro-Latin jazz, a Sudanese electric band, African and Diaspora popular music, and Calypso music from "Carnival in Trinidad 1991"—a festival that "promises to be the most creative in recent memory"—including "songs about this summer's dramatic attempted takeover of the government by extremists." In addition, there were the "American Jazz Radio Festival," the folk-music program "Mountain Stage," and, to reward any traditionalists who might still be around, "St. Paul Sunday Morning," a talk-and-play classical chamber-music series often using personnel from the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. One does not have to be a statistician

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to notice that, as devised by the practitioners of what might be called the new balance, only one public-radio program on this list of fifteen was concerned with high culture. Furthermore, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the reasons for the appearance of the other fourteen were not aesthetic, but purely and simply ethnic.

The second NEA communication was not originally meant for us to see; it arrived in an envelope without a return address. This leaked document was a memo, written on official stationery, to John Frohnmayer, the NEA's maladroit chairman, from A. B. Spellman, the director of the agency's Expansion Arts program (a vehicle for channeling money to minority artists, arts groups, and arts institutions), and Eva Jacob, an agency policy and planning officer. The memo's subject was "Cultural Diversity: Staff Training," and it articulated all the politically correct clichés now enforced everywhere in and by government.

In just three sentences, the memo conveyed the piety and smugness of the whole multicultural movement:

> In the course of this effort, we will need to recognize our own limitations and cultural assumptions. We need to be made aware of the extent to which our own education and understanding of the field has [*sic*] been limited by those assumptions—who has been excluded in the standard versions of our history, what other versions need to be considered. These are sensitive and difficult matters, which will require self-examination and will undoubtedly engender some conflict.

Here, at the level of those responsible for what foolishly used be called the "Governmental Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" in cultural affairs, is the assured acceptance and promotion of the radical case against our civilization: that what we have regarded as the historical greatness of our culture is—when correctly read—no more than a record of exclusion, insensitivity, and heedlessness. Accepted, too, by these avatars of the new radicalism is the happy prospect of mandating "self-examination" (so reminiscent of the old Communist goal of enforced confession and self-criticism!) and of social and personal conflict—but then, as we know, you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs.

It is always important to know what our public agencies have in mind for us. What they now have in mind for us in culture clearly portends the ruin of our common civilization and, if we do not take timely action against these potential usurpers, of our common society.

"White Male Writers" comes to Georgetown

In cultural life, as elsewhere in human affairs, it is sometimes the outrages perpetrated by minor characters that most effectively dramatize our situation and provide a measure of how drastically things have changed. A melancholy example of this was provided by the "Campus Life" section of the Sunday *New York Times* for March 3, in which we were informed that a course in nineteenth-century American literature at Georgetown University is now being offered by a black assistant professor named Valerie Babb under the title "White Male Writers."

Unlike many courses offered in college English departments these days, the reading list for English 112 at Georgetown is perfectly traditional: Hawthorne, Melville, James Fenimore Cooper, and Mark Twain were mentioned in the article. At a moment when many institutions—including Georgetown—have revised their curricula to include, as the *Times* put it, "less familiar but equally important works of minorities and women," a course focusing on writers from the traditional canon seems "unusual." (The fact is that the "less familiar" writers in question are seldom as important as the writers

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they replace, but that of course is an issue rarely faced.)

Do not think, however, that the Georgetown English department has suddenly become retrograde. Far from it. If the reading list for English 112 is traditional, Professor Babb's approach is pure multicultural revisionism, another small victory in the multiculturalist campaign to transform literature into a species of sexual and ethnic prize-fighting. Asked about the provocative title of her course, she replied, "This is just one small group within a large body of literature, so let's title it that. Just as we say native American writers, just as we say black women writers, these are white male writers." In other words, writers whom D. H. Lawrence had discussed under the rubric *Studies in Classic American Literature* are now to be reduced to specimens of their sex and skin color.

Defending the rationale behind "White Male Writers," Lucy Maddox, chairman of the Georgetown English department, noted that Professor Babb's course "placed the books of white men on the same academic level as books by minority or female writers." The problem is, alas, that while Professor Babb may place Hawthorne and Melville and Twain on the same "academic" level as minority and women writers of the period, no amount of multiculturalist maneuvering can place them on the same literary level.

But then literary value is never a high priority for our multiculturalist crusaders. At least in the case of "White Male Writers," though, there is considerable irony in the subordination of literary values to political ends. For in its effort to "foreground," as the current argot has it, the sex and race of these great American writers at the expense of their literary achievement, the course threatens to obscure the one thing that has preserved their names in our cultural memory and made them the canonical figures they are. There have been many white male writers in American history; why should we study these and not others? While one student reported that there was less "white male writer bashing" in the course than he had feared, we were given a vivid sense of the level of literary judgment fostered by "White Male Writers" by another student whose reading of James Fenimore Cooper led him to report that "Cooper is obviously an unbelievable racist." Indignation apparently left no room for the question of Cooper's literary accomplishment.

At the end of the *Times* piece, Professor Babb waxed meditative. "Who would know white men better than a black woman?" she asked. "I've got a legacy of great-grandmothers and grandmothers who cleaned house, washed clothes, diapered babies for white males. . . . My entire education has come from what might be called a white male culture." So now you know what it takes to qualify to teach American literature at Georgetown University.

Next target: the art schools

The nation's art schools, already seriously undermined by the cynicism and careerism that dominated the idea of artistic "success" in the 1980s, are now, it appears, to be the next target of the political thought police. Or so we are obliged to conclude from an article in the February issue of the *New Art Examiner*, the monthly journal of the visual arts that is funded largely by government agencies. In this article, entitled "Bleached, Straightened, and Fixed" and written by Catherine Lord, who is identified as the "chair" of the department of studio art at the University of California at Irvine, we are treated to the following observations:

> American art schools and art departments, like the American art scene, have been nothing less than a long nightmare for women, for people of color, and for gays and lesbians. While every ad-

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> ministrator in the country anxious to maintain the departmental body count has in the last few years learned to chant the mantra of "freedom of expression," "diversity," and "individual creativity," access to these goodies has historically been limited to white men, only a limited number of them gay, and those safely apolitical. The culture industry is profoundly conservative. Art schools and art departments, far from being the utopias for inquiring minds, have been prisons of sexism, racism, and homophobia.

Another charge brought by Catherine Lord is that many of these "prisons"—which is to say, art schools and art departments of colleges and universities—are, as she writes, "mired in painting, drawing, and sculpture." It isn't entirely clear from her article what these schools should be teaching instead of painting, drawing, and sculpture, but political indoctrination in the ideology of multiculturalism would undoubtedly be given a priority over what is called "Eurocentric Modernism," which is alleged to "relegate women and people of color to the margins."

It is—need we say?—the function of a good art school to teach both the skills required for the arts of painting, drawing, and sculpture, and some larger understanding of what the life of art entails. If these skills and this understanding are to be consigned—along with the rest of Western culture—to that famous ashheap of history, what functions will be left for our art schools and art departments to perform? The answer is obvious: politics, politics, and more politics.

In the political program that Catherine Lord is offering her radical followers, she advises them to ask of the school in which they serve the question "Who pays for the institution?" In this regard, it is worth noting that the *New Art Examiner* is funded by, among many other public agencies, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Illinois Arts Council, the Maryland State Arts Council, the Missouri Arts Council, the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and even, for its coverage in the United Kingdom, by a grant from the Arts Council of Great Britain.

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Moral homicide: illiberal education in America

by Roger Kimball

[A] cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life; these . . . are the objects of a University.
—John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (1852)

The idea that the curriculum should be converted to any partisan purposes is a perversion of the ideal of the university. The objective of converting the curriculum into an instrument of social transformation (leftist, rightist, centrist, or whatever) is the very opposite of higher education.
—John Searle, "The Storm Over the Universities" (1991)

It was not long ago that these preeminently liberal propositions drawn from Cardinal Newman and the philosopher John Searle could have been embraced as mottos by the American academic establishment. This is not to say that our institutions of higher education necessarily lived up to the ideal that Newman enunciated, or that they always avoided the perversion against which Professor Searle warns. But the ability to recognize an ideal as an ideal, or a perversion as a perversion, had not yet atrophied. Indeed, until quite recently there was robust agreement about the intellectual and moral purpose of a liberal-arts education. Above all, there was a shared commitment to the ideal of disinterested scholarship devoted to the preservation and transmission of knowledge, pursued in a community free from ideological intimidation. If one fell short of the ideal, the ideal nevertheless continued to command respect and allegiance.

There is perhaps no more dramatic index of the disaster that has befallen liberal-arts education in this country than the contempt in which the new academic orthodoxy holds this constellation of ideas about the nature and goals of higher education. It would be difficult to overstate the resulting intellectual carnage. Because the degradation of education implies the degradation of the future, "disaster" may be too weak a word. Everything about Newman's description—from its lucid diction and lofty tone to its praise of the dispassionate cultivation of the intellect—is an object of derision in the academy today. Likewise, Professor Searle's insistence that the curriculum not be reduced to a tool for partisan propaganda, "leftist, rightist, centrist, or whatever," is now widely derided as hopelessly naïve or insidiously reactionary.

Are there exceptions? Yes, of course. But they are increasingly just that, exceptions. Those dominating the discussion are committed to discrediting the ideal of disinterestedness and injecting politics into the heart of the educational enterprise. The recent, much-publicized controversy over attempts to enforce "politically correct" thinking on American campuses in the name of multiculturalism underscores the extent to which higher education has been transformed into a species of ideological indoctrination—a

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continuation of politics by other means. Anyone still harboring doubts is invited to try the experiment of proposing the gist of either of my epigraphs to the humanities faculty at any major college or university in the country. There may be a handful of professors who will agree privately—some will whisper their support afterwards if no one is looking—but most will sit in abject silence as you are informed by their politically correct colleagues that these ideas are reactionary, white, male, elitist, Western, and exclusionary, not to say outmoded. If the institution is up-to-date, you may even be directed to a sensitivity training class in order that you might avoid such gaffes in the future.

What has happened? The new academic elite—the tenured or soon-to-be-tenured radicals now controlling our most prestigious humanities departments—will tell you not to worry, that nothing has happened that need concern parents, trustees, alumni, government or private funding sources. On the issue of enforcing politically correct behavior on campus, for example, they will assure you that the whole thing has been overblown by "conservative" journalists who can't appreciate that the free exchange of ideas must sometimes be curtailed for the higher virtue of protecting the feelings of designated victim groups. And the curriculum, they will say, has not been politicized, it has merely been democratized: opened up to reflect the differing needs and standards of groups and ideas hitherto insufficiently represented in the academy. You are not against democracy, are you?

While the cynical and self-justifying arguments oozing out of the academy seem to satisfy those making them, the truth is far more dismaying than our new academic mandarins let on. What we are facing is nothing less than the destruction of the fundamental premises that underlie both our conception of liberal education and a liberal democratic polity. Respect for rationality and the rights of the individual, a commitment to the ideals of disinterested criticism, color-blind justice, and advancement according to merit, not according to sex, race, or ethnic origin: these quintessentially Western ideas are the bedrock of our political as well as our educational system. And they are precisely the ideas that are now under attack by *bien pensants* academics intoxicated with the thought of their own virtue. As the distinguished historian Jacques Barzun observes in *Begin Here*—a new collection of essays and addresses on education that displays the uncommon virtue of great common sense—"The current obscurantism, which attacks the Western tradition with the zeal of censorship, comes not from those supposedly unrepresented in the curriculum, but from academics and other intellectuals who *are* represented and hate their own heritage."[1] In the context of this fashionable variety of intellectual self-hatred, Professor Barzun goes on to note the "moral suicide" taking place in American higher education; since the victims include students as well as faculty, we may speak of something akin to "moral homicide" as well.

With the publication of *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*,[2] Dinesh D'Souza takes his place as one of the most important critics of these trends in the academy. A native of India, Mr. D'Souza came to this country in 1978. He was graduated from Dartmouth College in 1983 (where, incidentally, he was an editor of that notorious bane of politically correct liberals, *The Dartmouth Review*), and is currently a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.

As its subtitle suggests, *Illiberal Education* focuses primarily on the way racial politics and feminism have transformed the intellectual and social life of American higher education. In the course of eight chapters, Mr.

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1 *Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning*, by Jacques Barzun, edited by Morris Philipson; University of Chicago Press, 222 pages, $24.95.

2 *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*, by Dinesh D'Souza; Free Press, 319 pages, $19.95.

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D'Souza examines recent changes in admission policies that favor minorities, the multiculturalist effort to discredit and replace the traditional curriculum, the rise of racial and ethnic separatism on campus, preferential hiring policies for minorities and women, and efforts to restrict free speech in the name of ethnic sensitivity and political rectitude.

While Mr. D'Souza has garnered evidence from dozens of institutions, he concentrates on incidents and policies at the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University, Howard University, the University of Michigan, Duke, and Harvard. He visited campuses, conducted interviews with faculty and students, canvassed course catalogues and student newspapers, and dug into the background of various academic controversies. His main thesis is that there has been (in the words of the title of his first chapter) a "victim's revolution on campus," a revolution undertaken in the name of freedom and diversity but whose chief effects have been the enforcement of intellectual conformity, a destruction of academic standards, and a revival of brutish ethnic tensions. As always, the real victims are the students bamboozled by the new academic radicalism. As Mr. D'Souza notes in an eloquent summary near the end of his book,

> by the time these students graduate, very few colleges have met their need for all-round development. Instead, by precept and example, universities have taught them that "all rules are unjust" and "all preferences are principled"; that justice is simply the will of the stronger party; that standards and values are arbitrary, and the ideal of the educated person is largely a figment of bourgeois white male ideology, which should be cast aside; that individual rights are a red flag signaling social privilege, and should be subordinated to the claims of group interest; that all knowledge can be reduced to politics and should be pursued not for its own sake but for the political end of power; that convenient myths and benign lies can substitute for truth; that double standards are acceptable as long as they are enforced to the benefit of minority victims; that debates are best conducted not by rational and civil exchange of ideas, but by accusation, intimidation, and official prosecution; that the university stands for nothing in particular and has no claim to be exempt from outside pressures; and that the multiracial society cannot be based on fair rules that apply to every person, but must rather be constructed through a forced rationing of power among separatist racial groups. In short, instead of liberal education, what American students are getting is its diametrical opposite, an education in closed-mindedness and intolerance, which is to say, illiberal education.

Many of the examples, arguments, academic figures, and case studies presented in *Illiberal Education* will be familiar to anyone who has followed the controversy over the fate of higher education in this country: the replacement of a required course in Western civilization at Stanford with a multicultural smorgasbord, the antics of the Duke English department, and so on. But if Mr. D'Souza covers well-trod ground, he and his researchers have been diligent in following up on controversies reported elsewhere and in assembling additional supporting examples and evidence. The liability of this approach is that it sometimes makes the book read like a collection of news clippings (and in this context one must note that Mr. D'Souza is generally stronger when reciting evidence than when analyzing the intellectual movements they represent). Nevertheless, in its sheer accumulation of data, *Illiberal Education* is indispensable reading for anyone hoping to understand the cultural revolution that is transforming American campuses from institutions devoted to learning into "institutional grievance factories."

Throughout his saga, Mr. D'Souza's tone is cheerfully moderate; he often pauses to note the unsatisfied idealism he discovered in students, or the good intentions and pathos of the professors and administrators he interviewed. About motives, anyway, he seems always willing to give his interlocutors the benefit of the doubt. About results he is not so forgiving. While he has produced a case-

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book, not a polemic, the picture he paints is a deeply melancholy one. In providing a bestiary of contemporary campus life, Mr. D'Souza has chronicled the intellectual and moral degradation of a great liberal institution. "A new world view is consolidating itself," he notes in his first chapter. It is a world view in which the battle for ethnic and sexual redress trumps the battle for truth, in which group prerogatives have precedence over individual rights, and in which notions like excellence, merit, and quality are subverted by an effort to legislate virtue.

Even those who are well acquainted with the current academic *Kulturkampf* will find Mr. D'Souza's narrative chilling. Because even now many observers in and out of the academy persist in arguing that things aren't as bad or as widespread as critics have maintained, it is worth retailing in some detail a handful of his most illustrative examples. A large part of Mr. D'Souza's story is about affirmative action run wild. Writing about admissions policies, for example, he notes that "Virtually all American universities have changed their admissions rules so that they now fill a sizable portion of their freshman class each year with students from certified minority groups—mainly blacks and Hispanics—who have considerably lower grade-point averages and standardized test scores than white and Asian American applicants who are refused admission."

Mr. D'Souza provides numerous examples of the results of this scramble for minority candidates. Florida Atlantic University offers free tuition to every black student who is admitted, while at Pennsylvania State University black students who maintain a grade point average of C to C+ get a cash bonus of $580 a year; if they do better, they receive $1,160; neither white nor other minority students are eligible for this reward. As one observer remarked, "Everybody wants a piece of these students. The competition for them has become very keen." A black graduate from Stanford was rejected from Harvard Law School only to receive a flurry of phone calls a few days later from embarrassed administrators who offered him admission: with your grades, they explained, "We assumed you were white."

Not surprisingly, there have also been numerous calls for revising the Scholastic Aptitude Tests and other objective measurements of accomplishment in order to make them less culturally "elitist." A professor of religious studies at the University of Tennessee whom Mr. D'Souza quotes epitomizes this attitude: "when you see the word 'qualifications' used, remember that this is the new code word for whites." And what is meant by an alternative to traditional "white" academic "qualifications" (the ability to read, write, and compute fluently, a good stock of general historical and literary knowledge, etc.)? James Loewen of Catholic University is among those charging that the standardized tests are biased, and he offers the following multiple choice question as an example of what would be more comprehensible to blacks seeking admission to college:

> Saturday Ajax got an LD:
>
> (a) He had smoked too much grass
> (b) He tripped out on drugs
> (c) He brought her to his apartment
> (d) He showed it off to his fox
> (e) He became wised up

I wonder if one could contrive a more patronizing question—or one more demeaning to serious black students?

In his discussion of changes in admission policies, Mr. D'Souza concentrates on the University of California at Berkeley, the premier campus of the California system and a leader—if "leader" is the appropriate term—in granting preferential treatment to applicants on the basis of skin color and ethnic origin. What Ira Michael Heyman, former Chancellor of the University and one of the architects of Berkeley's aggressive affirmative-action campaign, called "a little social engineering to reach deeply felt needs" has produced a situation in which black and Hispanic students are up to twenty times more likely to be accepted than Asian

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Americans who have the same academic qualifications. To appreciate what Berkeley's policy means, consider this comment from Donald Werner, headmaster of Westminster Prep School in New Haven, Connecticut.

> The University of California at Berkeley made decisions on two of our students, both Californians. Student A was ranked in the top third of his class, student B in the bottom third. Student A had college board scores totaling 1,290; student B's scores totaled 890. Student A had a record of good citizenship; student B was expelled this winter for breaking a series of major school rules. Student A was white; student B was black. Berkeley refused student A and accepted student B.

As Mr. D'Souza observes, "a program that began as a campaign to *eliminate* race as a factor in decision making has come to *enforce* race as a factor in decision making." It is also worth noting that, at Berkeley and elsewhere, there is a kind of "intramural" hierarchy established within particular minorities such that some are regarded as more victimized, and hence more attractive, than others. Thus one gets more virtue points for Latinos than for Spaniards, more for Filipinos than for other Asians.

Of course, such aggressive affirmative action cannot stop with admission. Because most of the minority students recruited under affirmative-action initiatives are poorly prepared, they tend to perform poorly and have a much, much higher dropout rate than whites or Asians. Moreover, as Mr. D'Souza points out, their inability to compete effectively tends to foster separatism and ethnic "balkanization." Universities across the country are lowering standards and offering all manner of inducements in order to acquire an impressive portfolio of minority students. This may help them meet various guidelines for affirmative action, and it may allow them to "celebrate" their "difference," but it is not at all clear that it helps the students themselves. Indeed, Mr. D'Souza correctly observes that "American universities are quite willing to sacrifice the future happiness of many young blacks and Hispanics to achieve diversity, proportional representation and what they consider multicultural progress." In their effort to achieve equality of result, universities have trampled on the idea of scholarly merit as well as on the ideal of equality of opportunity. Not only is this unfair to the students who are systematically excluded for reasons other than merit, it is also unfair to the recruited minorities as well, who turn out to be casualties of the effort to legislate virtue.

Affirmative-action thinking is also rife in other aspects of academic life, with similarly dismal and divisive results. It has helped transform the curriculum—leading to the inclusion of many works solely because they were produced by authors of the requisite skin color, ethnic heritage, sex, or sexual orientation—and is increasingly affecting hiring and advancement policies as universities across the country compete with each other to fulfill affirmative-action quotas. The Duke administration—to take one typical example—recently adopted a new policy that requires every department and program in the university to hire at least one new black teacher by 1993. (Ah, Duke! Where else would we find the provost teaching a course in "feminism and botany"?) Here again, demographics is a great problem. According to data that Mr. D'Souza cites, in 1987 half of the 780 Ph.D.s awarded to blacks were in education or related fields. That year, there was one—one—Ph.D. awarded to a black in computer science, three were awarded in chemical engineering, fourteen in economics, three in political science, two in philosophy, four in religion. In 1988 there were *no* Ph.D.s awarded to blacks in several fields, including classics, botany, European history, comparative literature, Russian, and astrophysics. These statistics are indeed distressing. But, here as elsewhere, exchanging truth for a palatable lie is not the answer to social problems.

Troubling though the metastasis of affirmative-action thinking in the academy is, in some ways even more appalling is the much-

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noted assault on free speech that is being waged on campuses across the country. Once again, we see an abridgment of fundamental liberal principles in the name of "diversity," "difference," and "pluralism." Mr. D'Souza is absolutely right that "hostility to free expression in the name of race and gender sensitivities is now the norm, not the exception, on the American campus." With legislation that is utterly typical, the University of Connecticut has outlawed "harrassment," defined as "all remarks that offend or stigmatize women or minorities," including "the use of derogatory names," "inconsiderate jokes," "misdirected laughter," and even "conspicuous exclusion from conversation." Penalties range from reprimand to expulsion. In a breathtaking example of academic virtue-mongering, the university officials can propose such moralistic legislation in one breath and then go on to note in the next that will make no effort to restrict sexual behavior because "the university shall not regard itself as the arbiter or enforcer of the morals of its students." That is, it shall regard itself as the arbiter or enforcer of the morals of students only on certain politically correct issues.

Other examples abound. Mr. D'Souza reports that an editor of a student newspaper at UCLA was relieved of his post for publishing controversial material "without permission," while at Evergreen State College in Washington a student editor was suspended from a campus newspaper for "lack of coverage" of minority and ethnic issues. At Harvard, a law professor was upbraided by feminists because he illustrated a legal concept in his textbook on contracts with two lines from Byron's *Don Juan*: "A little still she strove, and much repented, / And whispering, 'I will ne'er consent'—consented." This, you see, is unfair to women because it encourages rape. Mr. D'Souza does not say whether these feminists also wished to burn Byron's works. They certainly went after the law professor. What is most disturbing is that Harvard officials, far from taking the professor's side, issued various pusillanimous statements warning against "alienating messages" and so on. The situation—is it Orwellian or Kafkaesque?—occasionally waxes so bizarre that it seems almost funny. Tufts has decreed that the speech of its students and faculty will henceforth be regulated according to zone: In public areas, speech is unregulated; in classrooms, libraries, and dining halls, "derogatory and demeaning speech" is subject to punitive action; and in dormitories, offensive remarks held to violate a student's "right to privacy" are liable to punishment. Students have dubbed these zones the "Free Speech Zone," the "Limited Speech Zone," and the "Twilight Zone."

What we are witnessing on our campuses is a tyrannical combination of extreme license with an almost puritanical censorship. Reflecting on the new demand for intellectual conformity, Donald Kagan, Dean of Yale College, notes that he "was a student during the days of McCarthy, and there is less freedom now than there was then." It is a strange situation. All indications are that American society is far more tolerant of diversity now than at any time in the past. Yet in their zeal to nominate themselves as victims of a repressive society, our academic radicals pretend to find sexism, racism, elitism, "heterosexualism," and various other "isms" everywhere. Thus we have Donna Shalala, Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, claiming that "The university is institutionally racist. American society is racist and sexist. Covert racism is just as bad today as overt racism was thirty years ago." In addition to being grossly irresponsible (especially in the mouth of a university president), such unfounded charges of racism, sexism, and so on make it all the more difficult to discern or criticize the real thing when it does occur. As the philosopher Sidney Hook observed in his review of the onslaught of multiculturalism at Stanford,

> morally offensive as is the expression of racism wherever it is found, a false charge of racism is equally offensive, perhaps even more so, because the consequences of a false charge of racism enable an authentic racist to conceal his

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racism by exploiting the loose way the term is used to cover up his actions. The same is true of a false charge of sexism or anti-Semitism. This is the lesson we should all have learned from the days of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Because of his false and irresponsible charges of communism against liberals, socialists, and others among his critics, many communists and agents of communist influence sought to pass themselves off as Jeffersonian democrats or merely idealistic reformers. They would all complain they were victims of red-baiting to prevent criticism and exposure.

Mr. D'Souza locates the origin of the academy's problems in the ethos of victimhood. "By converting victimhood into a certificate of virtue," he writes, "minorities acquire a powerful moral claim that renders their opponents defensive and apologetic, and immunizes themselves from criticism and sanction." As we see on campuses across the country, the elevation of victimhood into a sign of political and moral election has converted victim status into a weapon that students, faculty, and administrators use to stifle debate and enforce intellectual conformity. Mr. D'Souza's courageous and clear-eyed examination has provided us with an astute anatomy of this phenomenon and its baneful effects on liberal learning. But it is not clear that the "victim's revolution" he discerns is itself the cause of the university's embrace of what he calls "illiberal education." Behind the cult of victimhood is the insinuation of a Sixties-style radicalism into the center of academic life. It is this radicalism that is primarily responsible for the attack on the curriculum and the rise of politically correct thinking. Mr. D'Souza laments that "the middle ground seems to have disappeared as a consequence of ideological fracas and polarization." But the point is that "the middle ground" is now occupied by radicals, which is one reason that the traditional ideals of a liberal-arts education can be blithely disparaged as "conservative."

The issue is not the politics of this or that individual but the attempt to politicize education *tout court*, the attempt, as John Searle put it, to convert the curriculum "into an instrument of social transformation." Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a much-courted black professor of literature who is moving from Duke University to Harvard next semester, was quite frank about the nature of this political ambition. "Ours was the generation that took over buildings in the late 1960s and demanded the creation of Black and Women's Studies programs," he wrote recently in *The New York Times*, "and now . . . we have come back to challenge the traditional curriculum." A professor from Middlebury College whom Mr. D'Souza cites was even balder: "Now we have tenure and the work of reshaping the university has begun in earnest."

The noble goal of Mr. D'Souza's book is to reclaim higher education for a pluralistic democracy. This means reclaiming for the academy the ideals of advancement according to merit, color-blind justice, and the rights of the individual. It means resuscitating the ideals of rational inquiry and disinterested judgment as the strongest bulwarks against *parti pris* indoctrination. Critics warn that we must prepare for the multicultural society of the future by "democratizing" excellence. But the United States has always been a diverse, multicultural society. The best way to preserve equality and liberty in the future will be the same as it has always been: by rewarding merit and doing everything possible to insure equality of opportunity. As Mr. D'Souza observes, "High standards do not discriminate against anyone except those who fail to meet them."

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A solitary soul: the career of Kate Chopin

by James W. Tuttleton

One vindication of the revision of the canon in American literature today, or so it is frequently claimed in the academy, is the recent discovery and elevation into preeminence of Kate Chopin (1850-1904), a regionalist writer of the backcountry Louisiana milieu. In fact, however, Chopin's work has been long known to those with a serious interest in the literature of the period, and every university of any standing, in the South at least, has from afar back assigned her stories to students. I myself vividly remember reading her fiction thirty-five years ago in Chapel Hill, along with other regionalists like Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman. So Chopin cannot be claimed as a "lost" author newly discovered by the race-gender-class canon-busters. Indeed, Daniel Rankin presented the facts of her life in *Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories* in 1932, and Per Seyersted filled out the portrait in *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (1969). In the same year, Seyersted also edited her complete works —all this before the present Chopin revivalists arrived on the scene.

During her lifetime and for some time thereafter, Chopin was principally known as a Louisiana local colorist, a writer in the vein of George Washington Cable and Grace King. But Chopin is distinctly better than King and Cable, even though she never wrote anything of the ambitious scope and exotic romanticism of Cable's *The Grandissimes* (1880). Without question Chopin was a regionalist, as is revealed in the setting, subjects, and characters of her short stories in *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897) and in her novels *At Fault* (1890) and *The Awakening* (1899). Simply to list some of her titles—"The Bênitous' Slave," "Desirée's Baby," "Tante Cat'rinette," "Mamouche," and "Nég Créol"—is to suggest an exotic milieu of Cajuns and Creoles and that strange and faraway world of magnolia trees, Spanish moss, secluded lagoons, and mysterious bayous.

But local-color writing is now in disfavor in the academy, and rightly so, for nineteenth-century regionalism was mostly a collection of sentimental tales of local peculiarities of character—typified by the "most-unforgettable-character-I-ever-met" variety. Few serious critics pay much attention now to Bret Harte, Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, Charles Egbert Craddock, and the others. Unless, of course, the local colorists are women, in which case they are ransacked for evidence that they were real or proto-feminists and are accordingly exalted. Chopin is nowadays most often invoked as a brilliant portrayer of the oppressed condition of women under the "patriarchy," as a covert critic of the institution of marriage, and as a writer whose acute perceptions transcend the trivial representation of regional idiosyncrasies.

The revaluation of Chopin's work along feminist lines focuses on works like "The Story of an Hour." In this exceptionally brief

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but stunning tale, a Mrs. Mallard, "afflicted with heart trouble," is suddenly told that her husband Brently, who "had never looked save with love upon her," has been killed in a train wreck. Chopin writes that Mrs. Mallard "did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms." Then she goes to her room alone. In the room she stares out the window, fearfully awaiting "something [that] was coming to her." She does not know what it is, but something fearful is striving "to possess her." Suddenly it comes to her and, in a state of great excitement, she begins to whisper "free, free, free!" And she envisions "a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely":

> There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

She had loved Brently—at times. But that her husband might have loved her, or she him, counts for naught "in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being." Yet just as suddenly, Brently Mallard walks through the doorway: the report of his death has been a mistake, and the shock of his reappearance causes Mrs. Mallard to collapse. Chopin ends the story quite tersely: "When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of the joy that kills."

The story concludes in a remarkable reversal, yet its O. Henry-like trick ending, so popular in the Nineties, is saved from mere facility by the ambiguity of its ironic ending. What is it that kills her? It is easy to say, as feminists often do, that Mrs. Mallard's oppression in marriage flowers into a moment of freedom but that, when this is robbed of her, she expires in a fatal disappointment. She is thus said to be a martyr to the cruelty of marriage, which Chopin is at pains to criticize for its unfairness to women.

But such a reading, doubtless suggested by the tale, does not do entire justice to Chopin's irony. We might just as easily note that Chopin locates the desire for power over another in both men and women: "that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature." Mrs. Mallard's strongest impulse is here exposed as a desire to assert herself, perhaps over her husband, perhaps over others. This desire now seems within her grasp. If her husband, who had "lived for her," is to be condemned for bending her to his will, should Mrs. Mallard now be praised for likewise wishing to assert herself over others? Perhaps the joy that kills is the ecstasy of mistakenly believing that one is free from living for others and is at liberty to assert oneself over them. This much is at least suggested by Chopin herself, who, in a letter to *The Natchitoches Enterprise*, remarks of *At Fault* that "It were an unspeakable calamity if anyone should think he has the right to impose a private will on others. That is a part of a striker, an assassin."

As "The Story of an Hour" should make plain, Chopin was more than a local colorist; her sense of psychological complexities ran deep into the recesses of human character. One of the merits of Emily Toth's new biography, *Kate Chopin*, is that it establishes the ground on which a fuller understanding of Chopin's art can be based.[1]

Kate Chopin, despite the evident Frenchness of her name, was neither a French Creole nor a Louisianian. She was born in St.

1 *Kate Chopin*, by Emily Toth; Morrow, 528 pages, $27.95. Simultaneously appearing with this biography is Emily Toth's edition of *A Vocation and a Voice* (Penguin, 202 pages, $6.95 paper). This is a collection, previously unpublished, of twenty-three stories that Chopin was putting together at the time of her death. It contains "The Story of an Hour."

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Louis, Missouri, in 1850, to a slave-holding businessman father of Irish origin. Yet since St. Louis had been founded by French explorers and contained many old French families, Thomas O'Flaherty's marriage, to one Eliza Faris, allied him with a wealthy old French aristocracy whose names resonate with the city's social history—the Chouteaus, Gratiots, Benoists, Gareschés, and Charlevilles. Emily Toth makes much of Kate O'Flaherty's grandmother, Victoire Charleville, who apparently instilled in the child a passion for independence, a love of all things French, and a deep skepticism about "those Americans." Kate's family moved in the most exclusive circles; she spoke French fluently and read the latest continental literature. Kate attended the Sacred Heart Academy, where she had a conventional Catholic education, but she was an unconventional girl, and at her début she was described as one of the most beautiful young women of St. Louis. Clearly she was also one of the brightest.

Such a girl, belonging to such a social class, was automatically slated for marriage to a young man from one of the best families, and in 1870 she was married to Oscar Chopin, whose familial connections reached down into Louisiana. There is every evidence that they loved each other very much; Oscar was, as she put it in her diary, "the right man." After a honeymoon in Europe, they settled in New Orleans, where Oscar became a cotton factor. Neither Professor Toth nor anyone else knows very much about the nine years of their life there, except that Kate bore Oscar Chopin six children—Jean Baptiste, Oscar Charles, George Francis, Frederick, Felix Andrew, and Lélia. Given the readiness of feminist criticism to resent the constraints of marriage, particularly when the wife is said to be reduced to a "baby factory," such a bright woman, who bore six children in eight years, must have been miserable, no?

The interview testimony of those who knew the couple, gathered by earlier biographers like Rankin and Seyersted, suggests otherwise. According to their informants, the typical view was that "Kate was devoted to Oscar and thought him perfect." I make this point because some careless readers of *The Awakening*, who know nothing of the author, have been ready to characterize Edna Pontellier, the protagonist, as a self-portrait of the author. Nothing could be further from the case. Professor Toth knows this, but one of the vexing aspects of her biography is that she continually introduces impertinent parallels between Edna and her author, as if the novel were merely autobiographical.

Oscar Chopin was not successful in his New Orleans business; consequently, in 1879 the family moved inland to Cloutierville, a village in Natchitoches Parish, where the Chopin clan had large landholdings. Oscar managed a general store there and was apparently liked by all the townspeople. But he was so injudicious in his dealings and so liberal with credit that, when he suddenly died of malaria in 1882, he left his wife and children saddled with a $12,000 debt. Kate Chopin ran his store for a while, collected from his debtors, and eventually paid off the bills. In 1884 she returned to St. Louis with her children and maintained them reasonably well from her real-estate and rental income.

Chopin is such an expert witness of the tensions in marriage (as well as in other relationships) that Emily Toth is fain to develop a theory that the Chopins themselves had marital troubles in Cloutierville, and that Kate found solace in the attentions of Albert Sampite, a wealthy landowner in the village. The tale was bruited about many years later by the Sampite children and grandchildren that Kate Chopin broke up the Sampites' marriage. It is true that Sampite and his wife were estranged. But the legal records show that he drank and beat his wife, Loca, and she and the children left him. There is no public charge of an adultery.

What is the basis for Professor Toth's suggesting that such an affair ever occurred? Several dubious items. First, the old Cloutierville villagers liked to gossip about the New Orleans woman (née O'Flaherty) who wore plumed hats, rode astride, liked to flirt, played cards, and smoked Cuban cigars;

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second, Edna Pontellier's lovers, in *The Awakening*, are Alcée and Robert, the syllables of whose names, "Al" and "Bert," combine to make up Sampite's first name; third, some stories, like "The Storm," deal with infidelity.

The idea that the Sampite descendents might find it convenient to blame an outsider, to find a scapegoat for their parents' estrangement, seems less trustworthy than the juicy gossip Toth heard from third-generation descendants nearly a century later. It is worth saying, incidentally, that Professor Toth picks to pieces every male friendship Chopin ever had for evidence of sexual liaisons, as if Chopin's fictional treatment of infidelity could not have derived from observation of others or a vivid imagination. Having read her biography closely, I am inclined to think that none of the men Toth presents to us as possible lovers could have conceivably competed with Oscar Chopin or his memory. And it may have been the case that, after having been married to him and borne him six children, Kate was through with all that. In any case, there is no documentary evidence to confirm Toth's theories about Kate Chopin's supposed affairs, and she is perversely mum about Chopin's correspondence—how many letters are extant, to whom they were addressed, and what they say. In the absence of the facts, gossip must be seen for what it is—simply gossip. One thus finds little sound basis for the attempt to sensationalize Chopin's love life.

After Kate Chopin's return to St. Louis in 1884, she created something of a salon attended by locals with some rather advanced, though not radical, opinions. Of this circle only the journalist William Marion Reedy, of *The St. Louis Mirror*, is memorable. There she was accepted back into the most respectable social circles, was well known to Mrs. Charlotte Stearns Eliot (the poet's mother), and the society columns of the city newspapers regularly reported her comings and goings, her club activities, the ubiquitous teas and card parties, her fiction readings and book publications. She took no notice whatsoever of the burgeoning suffragist movement and eschewed political activism, feminist or otherwise.

Once back in St. Louis, she began to write. But it must be said that although Kate Chopin was prolific, most of the national magazines repeatedly rejected her fiction (they found her stories plotless), and most of it wound up in local newspapers or marginal magazines like *Youth's Companion*. Thus she never attained anything like the national reputation of a Howells, a Garland, or Henry James.

With the publication of *The Awakening* in 1899, however, Chopin attained a greater measure of celebrity, if not notoriety. This novel, set in the New Orleans and Grand Isle vacation area, recounts the life of Edna Pontellier, wife of a Creole husband, Léonce, and mother of two young children. She becomes increasingly disenchanted with her life. During her holiday at the sea, she measures herself against Mme Ratignolle, the "perfect wife" and "mother-woman" who is everything that Edna cannot be. In the course of the summer, Edna neglects her husband and children, then abandons them, and undertakes to become an artist. The pianist Mme Reisz, whose music is that of a profound and dedicated keyboard artist, sizes up Edna perfectly: she does not have the dedication to become a serious artist; her wings are too weak to soar above the ordinary life. Failed as an artist, Edna takes the two lovers Alcée and Robert, rejects the one and is abandoned by the other, and finally—all avenues of transcendence having failed her—she wades out into the sea and drowns.

The novel is spare and terse, brilliantly interwoven with an intricate symbolism, and it is remarkably deep in its psychological analysis and understanding. The Creole milieu is expertly recreated, and Chopin's narrative self-effacement forces the reader to do nearly all the work of interpretation and understanding. In 1899, in America, a frank presentation of adultery was taboo, unless euphemistically and evasively handled and then morally denounced by the author. But

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Chopin was not obliged to live by her art, and she was obviously indifferent to the standards of Genteel Era criticism. Her literary models were European—Flaubert (especially in *Madame Bovary*), Tolstoy (in *Anna Karenina*), Turgenev, and Bourget. Especially in Maupassant, whom she translated, she found the way to focus her laconic, ironic, penetrating, and even morbid representations of human psychology. The result was a novel of such deep understanding of the sexes and such aesthetic distinction that it deserves to be read more widely than it is.

Yet on its publication, *The Awakening* was pointedly criticized for its subject and treatment. One reviewer called it "unhealthy," another termed it "poison," and others were estranged by Chopin's failure to pass moral judgment on her heroine. There even developed a legend, widely circulated in the literary criticism, that *The Awakening* was banned in St. Louis, removed from the library shelves, and that Chopin was ostracized by the women of her clubs. Thanks to Professor Toth, we now know that none of these dire events occurred. Kate remained an intimate of the ladies of the club, and if the book wasn't available in the libraries, it was doubtless because the copies were always checked out. Responding to her critics, Chopin remarked in *Book News* that

> Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was then too late.

This evasive remark is typical of Chopin's playful and ironic way of dealing with people. Even so, there were quite a number of commendatory notices, and even those who found the subject of adultery offensive conceded the brilliance of Chopin's art.

In contemporary feminist criticism, Kate Chopin's reference to Edna's "damnation" is largely dismissed as so much ironic badinage. The novel is commonly held out to us as a work in which a woman, oppressed by marriage and motherhood, makes a sublime existential gesture of protest against the patriarchy in taking her own life. There is thus supposed to be something heroic in Edna's resolution of her problems. But this adulation of suicide needs clearly to be questioned. Edna's husband, Léonce, though possessed of a mild Creole sexism, is as loving and attentive as any husband of the time and place might be. Edna cannot think of a better. Their children are not monsters. Adèle Ratignolle's marriage and her many children are pointedly introduced as an example of what kind of fulfillment a woman, not averse to self-sacrifice, may find in wife- and motherhood. Edna's love affair with Alcée Arobin is merely carnal, and Robert's departure from Grand Isle seems motivated by an understanding that his chivalric attentions to Edna, common to Creole gentlemen, have passed into the impermissible.

What is most striking about the portrait of Edna is Chopin's expert grasp of the psychology of anomie. As Edna grows more and more affectless and dissociated from human relationships, she of course seizes upon their imperfections as the cause of her condition. But dissatisfaction with marriage and family is merely the peg upon which her deteriorating psychic life is hung. The original title of the novel was *A Solitary Soul*, and Chopin's theme is a pathological withdrawal from life; it is as pronounced as Bartleby the Scrivener's. None of Edna's self-assertive distractions—living for herself alone, committing adultery, and dabbling in painting —have a chance of lifting her out of the abyss of solitude into which she is descending. Edna's breakdown and suicide have their mysterious origin in a lost psychology of childhood, which Chopin only intriguingly but ambiguously hints at. In any case, Edna Pontellier is hardly a convincing martyr to the oppressions of men in marriage, and Toth's parallels between author and heroine are too forced.

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One value of Professor Toth's biography is that it refutes the claim that, after the poor reviews of *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin (like Keats) abandoned her art and died in disappointment. In fact, Chopin continued to write for the next five years, despite repeated rejections, until her death—which appears to have been caused by a cerebral hemorrhage rather than the reviews.

Anyone with a serious interest in Chopin's art will be grateful for the massively detailed and substantial portrait Toth provides of the writer and her world. I did not leave the biography believing that I knew Kate Chopin well: the picture did not come into perfect focus. There are simply too many gaps in the factual record, and Chopin —despite her sociability—was too private a person, a "solitary soul," a "lone wolf," as her son Felix put it. Still, there is much rich information here, and the book repays a close reading.

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Polykleitos redivivus

by Beryl Barr-Sharrar

A new phenomenon in the international art world is the propensity for exhibitions organized around a single artist from Greek antiquity. This innovative development bears little relationship to biographical curiosity, as next to nothing is really known about these ancient craftsmen. The traveling exhibition of vases and fragments of vases by the Attic red-figured vase painter Euphronios (*fl. c.* 520-470 B.C.), which recently closed at the Louvre, was an internationally cooperative venture encouraged by the connoisseurship that has greatly expanded the number of attributions to this artist, revealing a wider prospectus of his career.[1]

Scores of anonymous Greek vase painters are affectionately given names that describe a stylistic eccentricity or conspicuous subject so that scholars can group vases by individual hands: "The Affecter," "Elbows Out," "The Pan Painter," "The Painter of the Woolly Satyrs," etc. We know Euphronios's real name because he signed vases as their painter with the signature *Euphronios egrapsen* (Euphronios painted [me]) and, later in his life, as their potter or maker, *Euphronios epoiesen* (Euphronios made [me]). Presumably as he matured in his profession Euphronios assumed the more remunerative and socially significant position of potter and—since he was prosperous enough to make an expensive dedication on the Acropolis at some point in his life—probably master of the workshop. This elevation of status reminds us that, after all, the production of the pot preceded its painting. There are many more signatures of pot makers than of painters in antiquity. It is likely today that most museum visitors who stop to admire a fine Greek vase take for granted the shape of the vessel as a format, yet regard the decorations on the outside with the same appreciation they would a drawing by Raphael or Picasso. Although the big-walled calyx shape of the Euphronios krater in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (since 1972) attracts attention, it is the tableau of the winged Hypnos and Thanatos bending to remove the magnificent body of Sarpedon, Lycian prince and son of Zeus, from the battlefield of Troy that has engaged admirers. Elegantly drawn black lines describe the details of the red-ground figures preserved like silhouettes in a painted black field, their gentle faces impassive with the wide-open, fully drawn eye of Thanatos fringed all around with long lashes.

In the exhibition at the Louvre, the Metropolitan's krater and other complete and partial vases painted by Euphronios, and one signed by him as "maker," as well as other

1 "Euphronios, peintre à Athènes au VIe siècle avant J.-C." opened at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Arezzo, Italy (May 26-July 31, 1990), traveled to the Louvre in Paris, France (September 18-December 31, 1990), and is now on view at the Staatliche Museen in Dahlem, Germany (March 21-May 26, 1991). A catalogue, edited by Alain Pasquier and Martine Denoyelle, has been published by Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris.

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vases which placed him in the perspective of his own time, composed a visual monograph of a very long-dead artist. This was achieved despite a totally unsympathetic, mirror-dominated setting designed by Gae Aulenti, interior decorator of the Musée d'Orsay.

Both the motive and success of the recent exhibition devoted to the fabled ancient Greek sculptor Polykleitos (*fl. c.* 470-410 B.C.) at Liebieghaus, the museum for ancient sculpture in Frankfurt am Rhein, were of a different nature, as originals by Polykleitos's hand *no longer exist.*[2] Much less well known today than his younger contemporary, the Athenian Phidias, Polykleitos studied and worked in Argos in the northeastern Peloponnesus, the other great center for sculpture in the fifth century B.C. Polykleitos did not decorate temples with marble figures that might have survived. His works were in bronze. A single cast-bronze fragment of curly hair and nape of neck, at its greatest width no more than eight centimeters, stands out in distinctive Polykleitan quality from the more than a thousand little pieces found in the sanctuary of Olympia that survived during the breaking up and melting down of bronze statues for re-use during the early Christian period. It may well be the closest we will ever come to an original by this artist.

That during his lifetime Polykleitos was as famous as Phidias is attested in Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*, where Polykleitos is also associated with Periclean Athens. In Xenophon's *Memorabilia* he is praised in the company of Homer, Sophocles, and the painter Zeuxis. As both philosopher and historian were born about 430 B.C., they wrote within living memory of the sculptor.

Polykleitos was the sculptor of the classical nude *par excellence.* What knowledge we have of his work, and the developed connoisseurship that allows the attribution of the bronze fragment of hair locks to his own hand or school, we owe to the Romans' admiration of Greek sculpture and, in particular, their admiration for the work of Polykleitos. Cicero found Polykleitos's statues almost perfect, and Quintilian, who in the first century wrote a brief history of Greek sculpture and considered the High Classical period its apogee, said that while Polykleitos did not express the sublimity of the gods like Phidias, he represented the *human form* with a degree of beauty surpassing nature.

There are probably more Roman marble versions of the works of Polykleitos than those of any other sculptor. In Frankfurt, marbles stood in for lost bronzes as best they could, for a visual monograph more than once removed. The English archaeologist Sir John Boardman has found the studies of attributions of Roman marble sculpture to Greek artists "perhaps the oddest phenomenon in all Classical scholarship." For as the German scholar Adolf Furtwängler observed a century ago, any knowledge of Greek bronze sculpture based on copies (as, except for a precious few originals, it must be) depends in the first instance on "the discrimination between what is derived from the original and what is added by the copyist," and this requires rigorous detection. Archaeologists must distinguish between relatively accurate copies and adaptations or reinterpretations of Greek originals, eclectic works, and classicizing creations, the latter popular from the second century B.C. on and *themselves* copied by the Romans. (These *classicizing* creations re-cast the masterpieces of the Classical period in a specifically Hellenistic [later Greek] setting, using Classical elements in a Classical manner together with new, contemporary stylistic concepts.) Further complications arise in discerning the style of the copyist, which inevitably reflects his time (late-Hellenistic, Augustan, Hadrianic, etc.) and separating it from the spirit of the original. Still, because of their profound influence on sculpture for centuries, a few of the bronzes of Polykleitos

2 "Polyklet. Der Bildhauer der griechischen Klassik" was on view at Liebieghaus, Frankfurt am Rhein, from October 18, 1990, through January 20, 1991. A catalogue, edited by Herbert Beck, Peter C. Bol, and Maraike Bückling, has been published by Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz am Rhein.

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may be better known today than those of almost any other sculptor in antiquity.

In organizing the exhibition at Liebieghaus, Peter C. Bol brought to Frankfurt from over seventy museums numerous marble copies of the five or six individual works Polykleitos is believed to have created, copies of works believed to be by his students and followers into the fourth century B.C., and works *derived* from those of Polykleitos and his large and far-reaching school, including adaptations of Polykleitan body types for Roman portraits. Some of these marble sculptures were partial, even fragmentary, others were minimally restored; some were pleasing, many were not. Some of the best-known Polykleitan copies were absent, being too fragile to travel.

Most of the sculptures in the exhibition were sturdy, athletic, nude, mostly life-size young men—spectral in their marble pallor, the alignments of pale bodies evoking ranks of Marathon's youthful dead. Added to their numbers was a selection of Greek and Roman bronze statuettes that anticipated, imitated, adapted, mixed, re-modeled, or simply perpetuated Polykleitan ideas on a small scale. There were also a few ancient gems (some represented in casts) engraved with motifs invented by Polykleitos, or once thought to be. In a case of mistaken identity in the late Quattrocento, an image of Diomedes on an altar—balanced in a bizarre manner on the ball of one foot, the leg bent up beneath his body—on a now lost Augustan carnelian with the signature of its *carver* "Polykleitos," was believed to reveal a new (unstable!) Polykleitan pose. (In a drawing, Leonardo sat the gem figure down on a crossed leg, but he returned to the unstable pose in a later sketch). A small group of black- and red-figured Attic vases in the exhibition showed potters, bronze casters, and other craftsmen at work in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. and, on a red-figured *oinochoe*, Athena herself—in helmet and *aegis* but with shield and lance hanging on the wall nearby—busy modeling a clay horse, the first step in the production of a bronze one.

The traveler Pausanias, to whom we owe a careful and invaluable description of Greece in the middle of the second century, included among his observations of more than two hundred bronze statues of victorious athletes dedicated at Olympia five that he named and identified as the work of Polykleitos of Argos. Three he said were boxers, another a wrestler, and the fifth a pentathlete (who competed in five exercises including throwing the discus and the javelin). Modern excavators estimate that at one time there must have been over a thousand bronze statues by many sculptors in Olympia—of athletes, heroes, and gods. There may have been fewer by the second century. Anyway, Pausanias was selective, choosing for his guide to Greece only those he considered worthy of the traveler's notice. He apparently recognized the work of Polykleitos and his school, but was reading the athletes' names and sports from inscriptions on the statue bases.

Several of the names of athletes whose statues Pausanias attributed to Polykleitos turned up on fifth-century B.C. marble bases re-used in the construction of Christian buildings. From the floor of a Byzantine church came a base with a dedication from the "boxing champion Kyniskos of glorious Mantineia," whom Pausanias said was a boy. Scholars believed for more than a century that they had identified Kyniskos in an under-life-size Roman marble copy in the British Museum. The feet of a marble boy called the *Westmacott Athlete* (after the nineteenth-century British sculptor who owned it) were in a position which seemed to conform exactly to the holes on the horizontal surface of the base into which the feet of the bronze statue had been set by dowels. The boy is in a balanced resting pose with the weight on his left leg, the right leg set back and supported lightly on the toes and ball of the foot. The origin of this stance (the legs reversed) is associated with Polykleitos. Since the statue type appears in a long series of marble torsos and heads, it was apparently famous enough in antiquity to be copied often by Romans for decorating private houses, villas, and gardens. But the slender

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marble youth is less symmetrical and more languid in pose than other figures believed to reflect Polykleitos's work, so the original bronze is now generally (perhaps not universally) considered the work of a first-generation student of Polykleitos, perhaps a son or nephew. The marble copy, probably carved about the time Pausanias traveled around Greece, was presented in the Frankfurt exhibition in the context of Polykleitos's successors, together with other copies of its prototype and those of related works. The Kyniskos base, dated to 460-450 B.C. on the basis of the placement of the inscription and its letter forms, is still associated with Polykleitos.

Five hundred years after a statue was erected on that base, Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23/24-79) wrote in his *Natural History* that it had been strictly Polykleitos's invention to have his statues throw their weight on one leg (*uno crure insistere*). Small bronzes from the first half of the fifth century B.C. suggest that as sculptors tried to express movement in the standing nude male at that time, the "Polykleitan" arrangement of the feet, with one heel off the ground, may have existed without the subtle shift that threw the weight on one leg. At the same time, other small bronzes and notably the two extraordinary life-size bronze figures of bearded warriors found in the sea off the Calabrian coast of Italy in 1972—the famous *Riace Bronzes*—have their weight shifted to one side, while the feet remain flat on the ground. It seems likely that the successful resolution of these efforts to express movement and find a new, more realistic, balance of weight in the human figure was the invention of a single artist. Both ancient literary and archaeological evidence suggest that this artist was Polykleitos. He seems to have summarized the developments in sculpture that occurred in the aftermath of the Persian wars, consolidating movement and weight balance in the standing male figure, and, in doing so, epitomizing a new approach to the representation of the human form.

Pliny names eight or nine sculptures by Polykleitos. He describes one, of two naked boys playing dice, in the courtyard of the Emperor Titus, and because he lived in Rome it is likely that he actually saw this sculpture, as well as another he places in the city. Because Pliny was a *compiler* of information, we cannot be sure that he saw the other works he mentions, nor do we know if he was referring to marble copies or bronze originals. There is no full-standing replica of the *Herakles* he names; one of two widely copied types is probably the *Amazon* Pliny says that Polykleitos made; and a frequently copied male figure type, called by modern scholars the "Diskophoros," may well be the Polykleitan *Hermes* to which Pliny refers (though some think they are two separate Polykleitan creations). Only two statues mentioned by Pliny have been clearly identified to everyone's satisfaction in complete Roman copies: the *Doryphoros* (spear-bearer), which Pliny calls a manly-looking boy, and the *Diadumenos* (fillet-binder), which he says is a soft-looking youth.

The *Doryphoros*, the most famous then and now, was recognized in 1863 when a two-meter-high Roman nude male marble figure was unearthed from the palestra in Pompeii. A compactly built, well-proportioned young man (with the body, perhaps, of a modern soccer player), the marble figure has the prototypical Polykleitan pose that suggests both standing and walking, the weight on the right leg, the left leg free and balanced on the ball of the foot and toes: a highly formal, even artificial, stance which implies movement forward while remaining completely balanced. Anatomical details are accurate, and the hips and shoulders as well as the muscles of the torso respond to the tension of the stance, distributing the weight equally. The head is balanced over the stationary leg and turns to the right, giving the eyes a clear direction of focus. Short curly hair lies close to the skull. The youth is thought to have carried a spear or javelin with the slightly extending, bent left arm (the right arm is down), and is either an athlete or, some think, Achilles.

The strong suspicion that the marble was a

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fairly accurate replica of the original bronze was strengthened not long ago by the comparison of fragments of ancient plaster casts found in 1954 in Baiae (northwest of Naples) believed to have been taken in antiquity directly from the original bronze *Doryphoros*. Positive forms made from these fit modern negative casts of the marble *Doryphoros* from Pompeii with what is described as remarkable accuracy.

Polykleitos set forth the principles of his art in a treatise he called his *Kanon*. This treatise, of which we have only reflections in ancient sources, is believed to have been a highly technical, and perhaps philosophical, workshop manual that presented a system of measurements through which the anatomical parts of a statue could be related one to another in proportions sufficiently "perfect" to achieve *symmetria*, or precise commensurability. Pliny said Polykleitos created one statue that embodied the principles of his art, and was also called his *Kanon*, identifying the statue (perhaps not surprisingly) as the *Doryphoros*. Polykleitos's aim, as it is preserved for us, presumed the attainability of perfect beauty in the human figure, a concept that seems in our rationalistic world today extraordinary, a Platonic ideal.

As an ideal, and a famous statue, the *Doryphoros* was naturally a useful portrait type for the Romans, suggesting the *gravitas*, *dignitas*, and *auctoritas* of the noble citizen *sub specie aeternitatis*. The highpoint of its adaptation for portrait statuary is the rather oppressive, over-life-size *Augustus of Prima Porta*, dressed in a elaboratively decorated cuirass, his right arm raised in the Hellenistic gesture of the ruler addressing his troops—and upsetting the *symmetria*.

The *Diadumenos* is less schematic and more relaxed in pose than the *Doryphoros*: the young man raises both arms and slightly bends his neck as he binds a long fillet around his head. Winckelmann recognized it in a relief on a Roman grave altar a few years before his death in 1768, and the recognition of full marble replicas followed. God (perhaps Apollo), hero, or athlete, the *Diadumenos* is considered the latest Polykleitos statue known. In its greater suppleness, it anticipates both the softer poses of the work of Polykleitos's followers, and the modifications in proportions and increased mobility achieved by Praxiteles and Lysippos in the fourth century B.C. In its somewhat elegiac quality, it suggests the beginnings of the expression of mood and emotion in sculpture.

Sculpture retained the weight-bearing, relaxed leg motif and the proportions and mass of Classical form for centuries. The *Davids* by both Donatello and Michelangelo were clearly inspired by the Classical figure at rest. Flaxman and other neo-Classicists sustained the tradition into the first decades of the nineteenth century, and it was perhaps not until Rodin freed the human figure from the necessity of anatomical completeness and specific context that sculptors began to view the nude male body in an uncanonical, non-Classical way.

A shift in feeling over the centuries is indicated by a quotation from a 1910 or 1911 interview with Picasso (who as a student drew frequently from casts of antique sculpture) quoted in a footnote in John Richardson's first volume of *A Life of Picasso*: "What touches me in the art of antiquity is the sheer beauty of its restraint, but I must confess to disappointment at the way the proportions of Greek sculpture are dislocated by rhythms that are all too mechanical."

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Rolfe Humphries: in the American grain

by Ruth Limmer

Rolfe Humphries, the future poet, editor, anthologist, teacher, and translator, first reached public print at the age of eleven months. His mother, having decided that her already athletic toddler needed suitable clothing in which to romp, designed a play-suit for him, described it in an article for the magazine *Babyhood*, and for good measure included a photograph of Rolfe wearing the costume. And there he stands on the cover: blond, infinitely sturdy, holding a ball to his chest and leveling his gaze into the eyes of thousands of mothers. The pockets of his knickers gape.

One learns from his mother's unpublished autobiography that Rolfe's parents brought him up in an imaginative but most practical manner. Well educated themselves—both held Phi Beta Kappa keys from Cornell—they assumed their children would be bright and obedient, and would want to learn. And because they felt that public-school lessons were dragged to an inordinate length, they chose to teach their children at home until they reached the age of ten.

Rolfe, meeting their expectations, learned his letters from his blocks and from the signs in street cars; by the age of four he had finished the primer and the first reader.

She does not think to mention what Rolfe himself would later record: that his father taught him some Latin even before he could read, and that one of his earliest books was a Latin primer. More to the point, although his parents encouraged him to submit his writing to the children's magazine *St. Nicholas* (none was accepted), they did not acknowledge him as "creative." It was not until Rolfe was well along in high school that they identified his poetic gifts. He was doing the family laundry—his assigned household chore—when, according to his mother, he began a poem showing "unusual color sense." It was, she wrote, "out of the ordinary . . . a class apart."

Rolfe's interest in the classics and his lifelong addiction to sports were a direct inheritance from his father, John Henry Humphries, who chose as his first career professional baseball; it was, he thought, a pleasant way to earn money. But soon married to Florence Yost, whom he had met at Cornell, he opted for teaching, as did Florence. The two moved to Philadelphia, where Rolfe, the first of five children, was born on November 20, 1894.

After Philadelphia, the Humphrieses taught in Nova Scotia for a time and in Yeadon, Pennsylvania. Then John was hired as principal and superintendent of schools, at $1,500 a year, in the town of Towanda, in the northern Pennsylvania county of Bradford, where the family rented a ten-room house, surrounded by maple trees, for $12.50 per month, and Rolfe attended public school for the first time. He was ready for high school at the age of twelve, for college at sixteen.

Any convivial boy who had been initially schooled at home was bound to enjoy the social exchanges of high school and college. At

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Amherst, which he entered with the equivalent of two college years' credit in modern languages, Rolfe pledged a fraternity and spent what he called "a most delightful freshman year."

By that time, however, his mother had experienced the lure of California. In the summer of 1912, the Humphrieses and their children went west. For Rolfe, it was not love at first sight. The "vegetable paradise" was like the moon, "a bewildering foreign land."

In his doggerel "Autobiography," written in 1968 when he was already terminally ill, Rolfe remembered that "In Palo Alto things were rough." It was June; his parents would not begin to teach and earn until September. He and his father picked apricots that first summer, making enough to pay the freight on the books the family had crated in Towanda. But apricots could not supply a train ticket to send Rolfe cross-country again for his sophomore year. While his parents bewailed the state of elementary and secondary education in California, their oldest son cast a critical eye on Stanford University. "I found their whole tradition second-rate / Or a few notches lower."

The following summer, Rolfe and his father were hired to poison squirrels on government land, and he was able to turn all his earnings into train fare to Amherst. His parents paid for his board and books; a scholarship took care of the rest of his expenses, and he was graduated, *cum laude*, that June.

He too turned to the family profession, interrupted only when he was drafted for service in World War I.

> Camp Lewis was all right. I never could see
> Much sense in that Dos Passos company
> Of smug neurotics. Armies often find
> Values in discipline, body, spirit, mind.
> Is this outlandish, or remarkable
> As all-get-out? Do tell! And ain't war Hell?
> I liked my first assignment . . .

Discharged in 1918 without seeing overseas duty, he returned to teaching and to poetry, which became serious business now. Instead of attending graduate school, he joined Genevieve Taggard's poetry workshop and began to learn his trade.

Emerson might well have been gratified by this plain-spoken, sports-loving young poet who had learned populist values through experience.

> The class angle I was taught by my parents was the vulgar vs. the educated, and the technique of identification was by their grammar and whether they liked to read comics. But I learned for myself that the kids whom it was most fun to play with were the kids of janitors, and brakies, and farmers, and not the soft and yellow slobs whose parents owned the waterworks and the gas company. And I had the same lesson submitted to me at college, where I belonged to a third-rate fraternity whose members were sons of poor teachers and ministers like myself . . . and in the army again where the people with most wit and salt were the draftees from the trucks and orchards and oilfields of Ventura County and not the college punks from Stanford.[1]

Finally ready to join a larger, less peripheral society of poets, Rolfe Humphries left San Francisco for New York City in 1923.

Among the first committed poets he met in New York was Louise Bogan, who was to become a lifelong friend. "Rolfe presented, in those days," she said in a memorial statement, "a seemingly uncomplicated attitude toward life and art. He was continually belying what was patently a gentle and cultivated nature by flights of rather tough and fanciful humor. He was interested in baseball, in the race-track, in vaudeville and musical revues; and he used these locales in his work, long before pop art existed. He could

1 From a letter to Louise Bogan, August 23, 1935, the original of which is in the Louise Bogan Papers, Amherst College Library. Except as noted, previously unpublished writings by Rolfe Humphries quoted in this essay are in the Rolfe Humphries Papers, Amherst College Library; they are copyright © 1991 by The Trustees of Amherst College, and appear by permission.

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speak the American vernacular with skill, in a period when American poets were not giving 'slang' much attention. He seemed somewhat older than the rest of us. . . ."

Humphries was then twenty-nine, only three years older than Bogan, but his experiences were quite different: The product of small towns, Rolfe and his sisters and brothers had been raised to be verbal and self-sufficient by a liberated, working mother and by a school-teaching father who combined baseball with gardening, Latin with fishing trips. He himself, also a teacher, had established and continued to run a summer camp; he had risen to first lieutenant in the Infantry, training recruits to oil, dismantle, and shoot machine guns. In addition to which, he was balding. Rolfe Humphries looked and was a grown-up.

He was also a good poet and an engaging companion; in his own words, "a vivid and real sort of guy." Besides Louise Bogan and the transplanted Californians whom he already knew, he met and made friends of Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Allen Tate, and Léonie Adams. Not yet names to conjure with, they were all publishing reviews and/or poetry in the little magazines or in prestigious "smaller" magazines like *The Nation* and *The New Republic*.

Humphries landed another teaching job and, with the also transplanted Taggard still his mentor, soon found himself contributing to and editing *The Measure*, which was totally out of sympathy with the "half-said, half-conceived infantilities" written by such epigones of Whitman as Vachel Lindsay and Carl Sandburg. Its modest if high goal was simply to publish well-made lyrics. Humphries, who had impeccable taste, and who wrote short, formal, metrically sophisticated poems, fit in perfectly.

Meanwhile, in June 1925, he married "my nice comradely girl," Helen Ward Spencer, a practicing obstetrician and gynecologist who, like his mother, maintained an independent career throughout her life. In the early years of the marriage, Humphries and Spencer together with Bogan and her husband, the poet Raymond Holden, were a high-spirited quartet, attending parties, baseball games, movies, theater. With the birth of the Humphrieses' son, however, in August 1931, this larking abated. But Humphries and Bogan remained trusting friends and colleagues: they continued to criticize each other's poems in draft (Humphries was particularly skilled at this), to recommend newly discovered talents (Theodore Roethke was one such), to exchange enthusiasms and antipathies even during the period when politics drew them apart intellectually.

The rise of fascism, particularly as it manifested itself in Spain's Civil War, brought Humphries and Bogan into conflict. While she penned high-minded denunciations of any kind of political action, he joined the League of American Writers, whose aims included defending peace and democracy, fighting against fascism and reaction, and supporting "the People's Front in all countries."

Believing in its aims, Humphries was additionally buoyed that the League's membership included "real rank and file guys, no big city playboys at all." Bogan, recognizing a Communist front when she saw one, was unmoved, and when Humphries became what she sneeringly labeled "one of the Comrades," their fraternal battles over politics grew nearly fratricidal. Bogan lectured at him in person and in letters; not content with that, she attacked where it hurt:

> . . . if you feel there should be a war, then go and fight in it. Stop breeding childish hatred on the side-lines. Stop trying to shift what we must do with ourselves—the hatreds we must overcome or bear, the egocentricity we must grow out of, into adult life—onto Spanish factions, or Russian factions, or whatnot. Grown-up people do not want to shoot other people. It's axe-murderers and congenital inferiors in general who go in for that, as a way of proving their manhood.[2]

2 This and all other quotations from Louise Bogan's letters are from *What the Woman Lived: Selected Letters of Louise Bogan, 1920-1970*, edited by Ruth Limmer and published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1973.

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But even as Bogan was writing, "I still hate your way of doing things. To hell with the crowd. To hell with the meetings, and the public speeches," she was also supporting what became his successful application for a Guggenheim fellowship:

> I told the Guggs. that, as a critic, you were lucid, balanced and informed. I don't think you're always balanced, but then, I also said you had an impeccable lyric talent, that you knew how to work, and referred them to the last par. of your project. "That," said I, "is how a poet should sound."

Humphries held firm. He was, to the best of his ability, fighting fascism. That the route he chose was paved by Communists less innocent than himself made no difference. Although he had once understood that "guys that like to do what they please, like you and me, will be subject to almost as much fear and hatred as in a capitalist regime,"[3] now, like many well-meaning intellectuals, he was unable to accept that his new affiliation was already proving to be almost as murderous and certainly as corrupt and spiritually imprisoning as fascism itself. There was Immediate Evil, and as an American he must do something to stem it.

Humphries went his way politically; Bogan hers. Both unwilling, even unable, to yield, they growled their way to a non-aggression pact: they would avoid politics and stick to poetry. And by 1940, having concluded that he lacked a talent for politics and had better uses for his energy, he withdrew from both League and Party without fanfare.

Well before that admission, however, Humphries and the Spanish scholar M. L. Benardete put together an anthology of Spanish Loyalist poets, . . . *And Spain Sings* (1937). The translations were the work of American poets, himself included, and the profits went to Spanish war relief. Given Humphries's impeccable nose for quality, the collection was in no way meretricious. Even Bogan had to concede that the poems "throb with emotion, and are really written and observed, not just fried up, in theoretical fat. I was impressed."

Continuing to demonstrate his Loyalist allegiance, he used part of his Guggenheim fellowship to travel to Mexico, where he polished up his Spanish to translate García Lorca's *The Poet in New York* (1940).

The problem with the text was its surrealism. As a traditionalist, Humphries was made uncomfortable by it. In the introduction to the completed volume, he wrote: "I have followed the typescript as closely as I could, sometimes when I was not too sure it made sense—who can always tell, in surrealist poetry?" Then he added, like the informed classicist he was: ". . . there is no principle of objective epigraphical logic that the scholar-by-necessity can apply to extremely subjective surrealist stuff."

"Stuff." There is real aesthetic pain and no small degree of dismissal in what followed: ". . . the profuse succession of images, their seeming lack of relation, the prompt availability of the poet's unconscious—all this comes a little swift for the Anglo-Saxon mind; and in the surrealist poems, as in all work of the sort, there is a tendency for the material to be listed, rather than composed." His translations were a labor of love, less for Lorca as surrealist than for the Loyalist cause in which Lorca had lost his life.

Humphries seems not to have had a happy time during his Guggenheim year, which also took him to England, France, and Greece. He wrote some poems, worked on translations, but he was often lonely, and he missed hearing American spoken: "art for the ear is lacking," he wrote to Bogan from Mexico. Nor was he adept at keeping the diary she had urged upon him. Humphries was not a man who often talked, or wrote, to himself. Throughout his life he held that writing in general and poetry in particular were a "social business." ("Hell is a place of solitude . . . Where suffering is all the rage and fashion. . . .") And despite his affection for the many neurotics who were his friends,

3 From a letter to Merrill Root, July 15, 1924, in the Merrill Root Papers, Amherst College Library.

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he had little patience with the "wound and bow" school of creativity ("What becomes of lugubrious neurotics? / Nothing. They seep and stew in their own juice . . .").

The plain-speaking Humphries with his passion for baseball and the racetrack was, like William Carlos Williams, rooted in the American grain. There is even an atypical picture of him in a godawful double-knit jacket in which he looks the spitting image of a small-town insurance salesman. But he was not immune to the disease of artists: for a period in the 1940s, suffering from what he described as "nervous exhaustion," he sought psychiatric help.

Was the tough guy pose only a game? Only? No. Like baseball, it was a necessary game that renewed and refreshed and that served him—and those close to him—so well that he had always to come up to bat. In the spirit of his tender, nature-loving, Latinist father, who may well have dreamed of gardens while in the dugout, Rolfe Humphries wrote poetry between innings.

It is faithful poetry, the subjects exactly seen and rendered with high technical facility. The seemingly simple "Meditation for Sext" demonstrates his skill:

> Temper to eyes' endurance this unmerciful
> light,
> Coerce the sun with cloud; let shadow range,
> Stain, change these areas, this garish plain.
>
> White walls, white towers, white pigeons,
> unrelieved
> By rainbow feather, rain's brown stain, tree's
> shade
> Blind imperfectible mind with perfect grace.
>
> Fasting, faint, mortal appetite
> Craves less than quintessential certitude,
> Refrains from alien unfamiliar food:
> Give us our daily darkness.
> Let us pray.

If less overtly humorous than much of his work, "Meditation for Sext" is typical of his best in that it surprises the ear, sharpens the eye, and appeals to the mind. No received opinions, no obscurity, no fake language. (But also no thunder or fierce depth.) Humphries wrote modest, finely made lyrics, often—the humor notwithstanding—imbued with Virgil's tears for passing things. Even "Polo Grounds," probably his best-known poem—he told Bogan it celebrated America's ethnic diversity—has more than a touch of Virgilian melancholy as it meditates on permanence and mutability. Opening with "Time is of the essence," it describes "a highly skilled / And beautiful mystery," complete with Red Barber, peanut boys, and Carl Hubbell taking the sign, nodding, pumping, delivering. . . . And finally, after a roll call of former players, ranging from Bill Terry and Big Jeff Tesreau to "a left-handed catcher named Jack Humphries, / Who sometimes played the outfield," it ends:

> Time is of the essence. The shadow moves
> From the plate to the box, from the box to
> second base,
> From second to the outfield, to the bleachers.
>
> Time is of the essence. The crowd and players
> Are the same age always, but the man in the
> crowd
> Is older every season. Come on, play ball!

These final lines are the poet at his most recognizable: the meditative followed by the tough, by a line or phrase that brings the poem, and the reader, to earth.

Humphries's frequent use of slang or commonplace language to conclude a poem was rarely to be abandoned. In both original work and translations, he regularly melded plain American (which, as Marianne Moore said, "the cats and dogs can speak") with classical simplicity to produce what William Poster described in a review of *Forbid Thy Ravens* (1947) as a "dissidence," behind which lay "the urge to unite in one person all that is required of a lyric poet with all that is required for full, direct participation in common human experience and to express both."

So is it with his translations from the Latin. No one could have been more deeply

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steeped in the classics. In literal fact, because Virgil and Ovid were more familiar to him than Longfellow or Whitman, he was incapable of treating them or any other Latin poet as distant or dead.

> No classical writer ever thought of himself as a classic. . . . He writes, always, always, as a living man. He holds a pen, or a stylus, in a human hand at the end of a human arm; a bust does not write, nor does one of a series of bearded figures portrayed under fly-specked glass in the eighth grade classroom. He is much more concerned with his own time than he is with other men's past or his own future.
>
> Now, this sense of the living modern imposes considerable burden on the translator. Take, for example, such a relatively simple matter as the use of the second person singular pronoun. "Apollo, Thou Who has always pitied the grave labors of the Trojans." But this language sounds as out of date as does [the] prayer itself. What is the alternative? "Apollo, You Who—"? Yoo-hoo, Apollo! My own device for getting around this is to switch the verb to a noun,—"Apollo, always the pitier." [4]

Humphries described his translation of the *Aeneid* (1951) as a "quick and unscrupulous job." "I am not being modest," he wrote in the introduction; "a modest man would never have started, and a scrupulous one never finished." He took liberties and admitted them: he transposed lines, cut some names and allusions, replaced the general with the specific and vice versa, made changes about which he said "no pure scholar could possibly approve." (To which statement, irrepressibly, he added, "But I doubt if there is any such thing as an absolutely pure scholar, anyhow.") The essential Virgil remains: "Hear how the themes vary and recur; how the tone lightens and darkens, the volume swells or dies, the tempo rushes or lingers. . . . Hearken to it with the ear." There are more rigorous line-for-line translations on the modern scene but none that are more unpretentiously readable.

4 From an undated, untitled lecture.

By the end of World War II, Humphries's publications included three volumes of original poetry, two anthologies, and one translation (Lorca). But apart from the Guggenheim fellowship before the war, and a reasonably steady market for his work in respected magazines, he had not received any public pats on the back or any serious critical attention. Once Bogan could write to him about his *bête noire*, Robert Frost, "Why get mad about Frost and the Pulitzer? He's 48 or so, and just getting crabbed, so it's better he get it now than later. By the time we're 48 we'll get it; and then we can shut up and tell the boys around the cracker-box all about it for the rest of our days." But Humphries was now past fifty; one hears a growing discouragement: "Will centuries lay the laurel here? I hope so, very much, but that is a thing I must get not to care too much about." [5] This touch of self-pity would soon be mixed with resolution. "All I can do," he wrote in a different context, "is learn to write, and understand, a little better and put something created in, instead of killing something off." [6]

So following Bogan's advice to shake himself up, he enrolled in a studio art class taught by the young Robert Motherwell. He continued to write and review poetry. He prepared his fourth collection, *Forbid Thy Ravens*, for publication. Then it turned out that all was not futile. The new volume garnered for him the Shelley Memorial Award and called forth what he considered the most truly thoughtful appraisal his work had yet received. It was not that his poetry had been ignored when published in book form; it was that until the review by William Poster in *Poetry*, the appraisals—often studded with such appropriate words as "integrity," "humility," and "mellifluous"—never quite hit upon what he was attempting.

He himself took reviewing seriously but not glumly. In his piece on Edna Millay's *Collected Sonnets*, for example, after a brief

5 From a letter to Merrill Root, November 22, 1944, in the Merrill Root Papers, Amherst College Library.

6 From a letter to Richard Seamon, September 4, 1947, courtesy of Mr. Seamon.

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discourse on the sonnet form—"Stick to it and you cannot, very often, go far wrong" —and admitting the general level of her work was excellent, he could not resist some justified fun. Quoting a few lines about dinosaurs from her "Epitaph for the Race of Man"—

> In punctual season, with the race in mind,
> His consort held aside her heavy tail,
> And took the seed, and heard the seed confined
> Roar in her womb . . .

he described the poem as "sublime in its superiority both to the canons of sense and taste and to the laws of biology and acoustics."[7] He might have been kinder had he not noted that the collection was being marketed in two versions: once simply bound in blue boards, the other a "commodity" in limp leather and costing two dollars more.

Kindness, however, was not what he aimed for in his reviews; honesty and integrity were. Thus, faced with Robert Lowell's *The Mills of the Kavanaughs*, we find him saying, "I am sorry. I find him dull and I cannot make out what he is getting at; I am willing to take the blame for lacking whatever key is necessary to unlock the barriers in communication and understanding."[8]

Such plain-speaking integrity brought him into heroic conflict with Ezra and Dorothy Pound when they received his proposed introduction to a New Directions volume of Pound's selected poetry. Dismayed that he had called Pound an anti-Semite, they argued that he was insufficiently familiar with Pound's politico-economic writings to make such a charge. He must remove it.

Humphries wouldn't budge. Yes, he was glad Pound had received the first Bollingen award, but he was not going to bone up on *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* and *Unwobbling Pivot* ("there's more instruction, for me, to be gained by reading EP's literary criticism, and poetry"); [9] he was certainly not going to blur the issue with double-talk ("I have too much respect for the English language, and for your understanding of it, to go in for tergiversation and weasely circumlocution"); [10] and he was absolutely not going to be false to what he knew to be the vile truth ("You don't like [my introduction], you get somebody else to do it").[11]

Humphries, never particularly temperate, was furious. But there had also to be delight in landing a solid punch in a righteous fight. If they expected him to plow through Pound's eccentric tracts, oughtn't he also get to read the transcripts of Pound's wartime radio broadcasts? "I have no first-hand knowledge of that, either." [12] His message, which the Pounds chose not to hear, was that he also stood ready to discuss the grounds on which Pound was charged with treason.

Humphries's introduction went unpublished. The expense of time and energy bothered him far less—for he believed Pound to be a great poet—than that wasted on reading and reviewing the pretentious, phony, self-regarding prose and poetry written by "autists"—those writers, usually haters of technical excellence, who produce "masterpieces of self-expression." Eugene O'Neill, Robinson Jeffers, Thomas Wolfe, and unnamed others suffered from what he described as "deflected" creative energy, the kind that, because it is discharged "in the wrong direction—inward rather than outward, becomes egocentric rather than ecstatic, fantastic rather than real, secretive rather than given to communication." Such energy, Humphries continued, leads to "the weird and howling music, the fetal and fecal surrealist paintings, the murder-per-page detective stories . . . and the genteel verses that people are always writing to the Sunday *Times* to inquire about."

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7 From "Verse Chronicle," by Rolfe Humphries; *The Nation*, December 20, 1941.

8 From "Verse Chronicle," by Rolfe Humphries; *The Nation*, July 28, 1951.

9 From a letter to Dorothy Pound, March 5, 1949. All letters from Humphries to Dorothy and Ezra Pound are in the Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

10 From a letter to Ezra Pound, April 5, 1949.

11 From a letter to Ezra Pound, March 24, 1949.

12 From a letter to Dorothy Pound, March 5, 1949.

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In the spirit of *The Measure*, Humphries continued to worship Apollo and reject Dionysis; to give his allegiance to the poem rather than to the expression of the poet's personality. His critical admiration went toward "minor" artists like Housman and Hopkins, like Bogan (like himself?), who possess, "to an almost hypersensitive degree, scrupulous and fastidious critical taste," who "constantly strive for technical improvement," and who know that what "comes too easy is never any good."

The article in which these opinions appeared, "On the Creative Imagination," is a rare one.[13] In addition to expounding an aesthetic credo, Humphries seems to be encouraging himself at a time when his own creative juices were, he feared, drying up; at a time when his "nervous exhaustion" led him to visit Bogan's psychiatrist, Dr. James Wall, a man with delicate insight into the creative personality. It is likely, too, that Wall assured him that the creative imagination is "*always there, and always working*," although it may be working passively, taking in rather than actively discharging.

Humphries's italic emphasis speaks as much to his need for reassurance as his conclusion speaks for his place in literature:

> The great artist, although he may not be able to command the current to flow as he wills, can take it, and he can use it, greatly. The autists, under compulsion, may do more; the minor artists, under restriction, may do as well, if not as much; the great artist combines quality and quantity and transcends both.

Then, without author or title, he quotes in full a poem by his old friend Louise Bogan.

> Slipping in blood, by his own hand, through pride,
> Hamlet, Othello, Coriolanus fall.
> Upon his bed, however, Shakespeare died,
> Having endured them all.

The suppressed title is "To an Artist, to Take Heart."

Taking heart is rarely easy, and there certainly was reason for his exhaustion: a personal life that had become more complicated and the energies expended in teaching. But teaching was, after all, his metier. Although he would "roar with disapproval" at shoddy work, he was also unusually patient and would spend endless, unrewarded hours in conference with his students, just as he spent hours, by letter and in person, with the young Theodore Roethke, whose obvious talent made the effort pay off.

But no "pay off" was necessary; teachers like Humphries give of themselves because giving is inherent in their practice of the vocation, which, although serious, need not be entrapping. A former student at the Woodmere Academy on Long Island, where Humphries taught for thirty-two years, describes him as "superb . . . unequalled as a teacher" but also remembers that he "occasionally put an exam on the blackboard for his last-period Latin class and then bugged out for the racetrack."

Once retired—essentially fired—from Woodmere at the age of sixty-two (former-student testimony reports that everyone loved him "except lazy students and power-hungry administrators"), Humphries sought another teaching position. Finally Amherst, his beloved alma mater, called him back to become a professor of English.

The eight Amherst years were gratifying ones. His wife eventually moved her medical practice to Amherst and, surrounded by the scenic charms of New England, he flourished, writing original poetry as well as translations of Juvenal, Martial, and more Ovid. In his last year there—his seventieth—Indiana University Press published his collected poems, 261 in all, handsomely designed with his signature in gold on the cover.

He could look back with certain pride. Having chosen his poetic path, he never retreated; never suffered fools or poetical entrepreneurs gladly; never hesitated to do battle against the mighty; never ceased to champion little-known poets for whose work

13 "On the Creative Imagination," by Rolfe Humphries; *The Nation*, October 9, 1943.

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he had admiration. He included them in his two *New Poets* anthologies, became their friend, and selflessly urged their merits, not because he had anything to gain but because the addition of their poetic palettes would further enrich the American landscape.

In the end, it was the California landscape that called to him. In 1965, the same year that Humphries retired from Amherst, John, the Humphrieses' only child, died in a motor accident. John had owned a small house in Woodside. The Humphrieses enlarged it and moved in; with his sisters and a brother nearby, Northern California had finally become congenial territory.

There he completed the last of his translations of the major poems of Latin literature, Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, or *The Way Things Are* ("I'll correct errors the scholars say are gross ones of interpretation, but will be pig-headed about style, including the perverse and deliberate anachronisms").[14] And despite physical ailments which kept him from "anything more strenuous than washing the dishes, watering plants, climbing Cardiac Hill from the parking lot at Candlestick to the grandstand, or commuting between sellers and cashiers windows at horse track,"[15] he proceeded to amuse himself. He entered *New Statesman* competitions; he wrote more poems in Welsh meters, a tour de force he had first achieved in *Green Armor on Green Ground* (1956), where he composed poems in all twenty-four of the official meters; he began a series of ribald limericks, one for each of the towns in Bradford County, Pennsylvania; he composed poems with titles like "The Chillblain Indians" ("made up of whole cloth, or their own red skins") and "The Screaming Meemies" ("no excuse in the world for this, written on Twelfth Night, 1969, except for the fatuous delight in one's own idiotic brand of humor").

Along with the jokiness and some bravura "stunts," such as a charming poem whose initial lines contain words in alphabetical order—"Albermarle Beach contains . . . Dune, ebb, flow . . ." and so forth down to "Xerox your zest"—he began, faced with illness, increasingly to focus on finalities, on death. *Coat on a Stick* (1969), which contains these last poems, is not his best volume, but it exemplifies his good humor and his courage on the brink of extinction. One poem, not included in the book, began "Bedpan, bedpan, burning bright / plastic-blue all day, all night . . ." "If you are sick enough," he noted, "you tend perhaps even to overvalue [bedpans and urinals,] these simple friends and helpers of mankind."

But he was also summing up: Three ills: "Bedsores and bills, / Words without meaning." Three lovely sounds: "bells, and the wind's / Laughter at lands, / Train-whistles at night." Three simple queries: "'Why?' 'Who wants worries?' 'Have you no taste?'" And finally, "Three are the joys / For ultimate choice: / Laughter and praise, / Rapture in living"—praise for the sweetly turned double play; praise for race horses, "heads held high, / In all their delicate, fastidious, proud / Grace and perfection, stepping past the crowd"; praise for the "searching, subtle, varied, and profound" poem—"How good our modern poetry is, really and truly!"; praise for "the very best form which national propaganda can take, the implicit and pervasive doctrine [in the *Aeneid*] that great and good as our enemies may be, we can admire them, surpass them, be just to them, and not be afraid of them either."

Rolfe Humphries died on April 22, 1969. In her memorial statement at the National Institute of Arts and Letters, to which he had been elected sixteen years before, Louise Bogan said, "The essential Rolfe never changed. He continued to live simply, and to encourage young talent. He wrote wonderful letters, and even in his last, difficult illness, would write post cards filled with his old sense of absurdity. . . . [I]t was an indomitable man and an unforgettable poet who recently left us."

14 From a letter to Edmund Wilson, January 26, 1967, in the Edmund Wilson Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

15 From a letter to Humphries's former student Barbara Heldt, September 9, 1967.

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Poems *by Walter McDonald, Randy Blasing & Mary Jo Salter*

Black wings wheeling

Across a mile of meadow, I see
what the horse sees, a whirling
funnel of wings in slow motion.

I know what we'll find, if I ride there,
the horse not willing to back-talk.
Whatever it was, it's over,

no more desire or fear forever—
a calf that wandered off
down crumbling shale, bone-snapped,

unable to bawl loud enough
until it starved. Or only a rabbit
that outlived the rattlers,

the safest death, simply to lie down
under blue skies and sleep, accepting
this as the way, not dreading anything.

—*Walter McDonald*

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Hardball

After barrel-chested Earl Torgeson
(my father's favorite) & workmanlike
polite Bill Tuttle (my mother's) had vanished
into the bus in the shadows outside
Comiskey Park, I found myself
asking my idol, Al
Kaline, how to connect with the curve balls
I had already seen coming at twelve,
& he answered
shyly, a twenty-two-year-old crew-cut
blond "phenom" speaking from experience,
You have to find

your own way. It happened my way
would mean taking a page from the curves' book
& winding down—as on a spiral stair—
into the ground along the lines
of the biggest curve imaginable,
which ends up in the dirt. No star, I knew
I'd never rise above the earth,
but sometimes I'd feel light-headed descending
on the spin my English put on each step
I took. In a word, I would make a virtue
of necessity, which, like rules,
freed me to play the game I'd choose.

—*Randy Blasing*

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Art lesson

Why has Iceland no Tiepolo?
World's most ambitious clouds, and no
portraitist to do them justice;
is it because they won't sit still? Racing,
as if from the weather they bring,

and bring away, they're more suited to a motion
picture screen. The new configuration
locked in each frame is the fingerprint
of the moment. Round up the usual suspects, but
these won't come again, let

alone in this lineup's order: not the cloud
of scallops stacked like a candle's cooled
puddles of melted tallow, followed by
an ivory envelope, from which the torn
edge of one fuchsia sheet emerges. Shorn

sheep's wool figures in nearly any account
of clouds; easier to describe than paint
a rough-hewn hug of nubbled shearling, thrown
perilously near the sun, as if on
the floor before a fire. What happens when

a corner of it ignites? Here,
as you might have guessed, a *geysir* (or geyser:
among the few Icelandic words to spring
up in English) from an airborne surface
rises in puffs, sallow and sulfurous.

All this takes shape in a howling Arctic
wind: strong enough to blow a cloud back-
wards and inside-out, like an umbrella,
disperse it, or dispense with it altogether.
If half the sky's blackened in, like a weather-

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man's diagram of "partly cloudy," the thunder-
head may well amount to nothing and/or
everything: an enormous, deafening chain
of hail linked with rain, dashed on the deck
of the windowsill, even while a weak

joke of a sun smiles drily, not far off.
Black bleeds to gray, gray to an overlay of
violet; a peaceful co-existence like
the aftermath of an argument in a play:
"They were both right," the audience learns to say.

Is it possible no such message was ever meant?
—For now a new crop of clouds looks innocent
and dumb as the rubbery filaments on the top
of egg-drop soup; or coming down to
earth, like a white-haired crown below a blue

bald spot. Let's face it: life means precious little.
Which is why we keep staring at it, and the beautiful
is the ideal, why pictures have to be painted,
and painters may try to excel quite free,
if they wish, of allegory. "Why

has Iceland no Tiepolo?" was what
we began with, and still hope to answer, but
why, for that matter, the Icelanders' lame
idea of beauty at home: the ghastly
antimacassars, the fuss-budget curtains, the pea-

green bedroom suites, the gilded table-
and chair-legs, the scratchy sofas, the unbearable
(but tantalizingly breakable) bric-a-brac?
Could this be something universal, a crying
need to sabotage or unsay the undying

presence of the Sublime—the uplifting rain-
bow and arrow of sun, or the measured spoon-
ful of snow-bright light in the distant
valley's cup, or even the flattened suds
in the day's last tilted dishpan of used-up clouds?

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One hopes not, but thinks so; and suspects Tiepolo
would probably not have had much of a window,
in his turf-house here, to look out from. This
lesson's a shaggy-dog tale, in which the snow's
blowing in all directions, like the shadows

in a bad painting; the simplest explanation
fell into place as soon as I asked Steinunn,
a woman of taste, who runs the prettiest
café in greater Reykjavik. She said, "My
grandparents were farmers. When the sky

looked a certain way, over a certain mountain,
they knew the snows were coming. And that within
a day or two they'd have to travel over
miles of lava fields, gathering all their sheep.
When you have to watch your footing, you don't look up;

when the weather's treacherous, and life's a struggle,
neither the clouds nor the land is beautiful."

—Mary Jo Salter

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Music

Sellars trumps Mozart

by Samuel Lipman

It was bound to happen. The combination of the two hundredth anniversary of Mozart's death and the *réclame* that greeted the avant-garde stage director Peter Sellars's productions of the master's operas a few years ago at the Pepsico Summerfare Festival must have supplied the Public Broadcasting Service with a marriage made in media heaven. The result was the broadcasting of three of the greatest Mozart operas on PBS this past winter in Sellars's *outré* (to say the least) versions.

At this point there is little to be said about the current Mozart celebrations. Lincoln Center is doing all—every note—of Mozart's music; the Philips record label is bringing out a similarly complete edition on compact disc. As might be imagined, the musicological community has fully mobilized itself, and a spate of Mozart books, describing in great detail every facet of the composer's life and works, is flooding the book stores. Just one example of the academic interest in Mozart is provided by a several-day conference this past February at Hofstra University called "200 Years of Research and Analysis"; the conference brought together scholars from Europe and America to discuss such topics as "Performance Implications of the Topical and Rhetorical Devices in Three Mozart Masses" and "'Mozart-Rezeption im 20.Jahrhundert': Methods and Results of Research at the University of Salzburg."

It cannot be doubted that the present Mozart hoopla is only a continuation of the love affair we have been having with the composer since at least the 1950s. Many will still remember the 1967 movie *Elvira Madigan*, whose score featured the slow movement from the Piano Concerto in C major, K.467, a chaste and simple melody that achieved the status of a hit song. In the early 1980s, it was the turn of Peter Shaffer's play (and movie) *Amadeus* to bring Mozart as both man and artist to a mass audience. By the late 1980s, Mozart festivals were in place in just about every musically sophisticated community in the United States. Our present idea of Mozart has moved far from the serene elegance ofhis nineteenth-century image; now, powerfully influenced by the way he was presented by Shaffer, we find the composer coarsely masculine as well as divinely gifted, as much untamed child as musical nonpareil.

I suppose that Peter Sellars might be described by his admirers as a kind of contemporary theatrical Mozart. Still in his thirties, Sellars was for a short but controversial time the head of the American National Theater in Washington, D.C., and is now the director of the Los Angeles Festival, an avant-garde and multicultural spin-off of the 1984 Summer Olympic Games. In 1987, he directed the first performances of John Adams's opera *Nixon in China*, a production noteworthy for its sparse stage settings, often using crudely built and painted props, and its venomous portrayal of former Secretary of State Henry

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Kissinger. What has marked Sellars's work throughout his career is an unceasing effort to use the most topical images to evoke the most vivid contemporary reactions, an effort he pursues whether the underlying art he is directing comes from the classic past or from the present time. For Sellars the goal is always relevance and immediacy; unlike the avant-garde director Robert Wilson, who sacrifices clear meaning to an aesthetic preoccupation with hieratic movement and highly subtle lighting, Sellars aims for the audience's jugular, and usually manages to hit it square on.

His Pepsico Summerfare Mozart productions, of *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*, were enormous successes in what might be called the quality press, providing jaded critics with something new to write about. Sellars had the effrontery—or for his admirers the courage—to apply "updating" even to what have been seen for many decades as the greatest works of the blessed Mozart. Building upon a post-World War II European tradition of bringing even the most celebrated operas of the past into our time, Sellars applied to Mozart the directorial will that had previously been applied to Wagner by the Marxizing Patrice Chéreau in the 1976 Bayreuth celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the *Ring* and, on a rather less exalted level, by the American director Frank Corsaro, when he set a New York City Opera production of Bizet's *Carmen* in the Spanish Civil War.

Now the Pepsico productions, as filmed in live studio performances by American singers and accompanied by the Vienna Symphonic Orchestra, have in broad outline been transferred to television. *The Marriage of Figaro* is set on the fifty-second floor of New York's Trump Tower, with Count Almaviva and his lechery very clearly intended to remind us of "The Donald" and Marla Maples. *Don Giovanni* is set in the South Bronx, amidst all the brutality and squalor of an urban ghetto. And *Così fan tutte* takes place in a flashy neon-signed Westchester diner, with the characters six flaky denizens of lower suburbia, the women clutching their love-feelings, and the men looking to swap partners.

I must first make clear what Sellars does *not* do. He does not, at least in any direct way, touch the music. The operas are sung in the original Italian, rather than in English translation. Craig Smith, his long-time musical collaborator, has been at great pains to perform the music in a traditional and even "authentic" way, going so far as to use a fortepiano, rather than a modern-sounding piano or an old-fashioned-sounding harpsichord, to accompany the work's many *recitativo* passages. The Vienna Symphonic Orchestra plays well, if not outstandingly; the listener is often forced to remind himself that the orchestra for the Sellars productions is the Vienna *Symphonic* Orchestra, not the Vienna *Philharmonic*, one of the greatest orchestras in the world and an ensemble uniquely specialized in the great Mozart operas. The singers perform their notes in a highly creditable way, demonstrating excellent intonation, adroit technique, and generally attractive total quality.

Indeed, if one were only to listen to (rather than watch) these productions, one would think them representative of today's international standards of operatic performance. True, these films do not contain any vocally commanding portrayals—but then such portrayals are a scarce commodity today under the best of circumstances. Ensemble between singers and orchestra is in general satisfactory, and indeed often more satisfactory than is to be heard on the average run of today's broadcasts from the most important American opera houses. If there were one overriding criticism to be made of these performances in purely musical terms, it would be that everyone—singers, conductor, and orchestra alike—conveys a certain helter-skelter atmosphere, as if the musical enterprise not only lacked necessary repose, but were actually in the grip of some extramusical goading that made serene passages often seem hasty, and animated passages on occasion hysterical.

It is also necessary to make clear that Sellars is not concerned to trivialize Mozart. As all of his many comments during the broadcasts (including a separate half-hour preview

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broadcast the night before *The Marriage of Figaro*) demonstrate, Sellars takes these Mozart operas very seriously, finding in them not only the greatest lyric theater, but a veritable *vade mecum* to human relations, and to the ultimate human condition. Perhaps because Sellars so fully subscribes to the present Mozartolatry, he finds the composer too wonderful to leave untouched; Mozart must be made available to today's audiences, and especially to today's American audiences.

In order to make Mozart so available, Sellars has decided that he must bring Mozart to our audience, rather than our audience to Mozart. His own words on the preview tape could not make the point more simply:

> I think when you do opera in America you have to do it for Americans, with Americans, by Americans. So you have to do it in such a way that people feel it's a part of their own vocabulary.

Simple as his words undoubtedly are, they deserve further examination. Hidden behind his operatic credo is a low estimation of the world out of which he himself comes. Sellars accepts as a given that Americans are the ultimate provincials, carpentering everything to their own size and their own standards, and interpreting everything, even the most universal works of art, in their own image.

Going hand-in-hand with his assessment of Americans as mired in nativism is Sellars's willingness to use any and all possible enticements to sell his work to the audience. Thus in a short announcement just preceding the *Marriage of Figaro* program, a woman's voice began with the words "Mozart comes to Manhattan for . . ." and was immediately followed by Sellars completing the pitch: ". . . an evening of out-of-control sexual exploitation and aggression, political theory, and big entertainment. Stay tuned." Similarly, before the showing of *Così fan tutte*, Sellars was at some pains to translate the rather enigmatic Italian title of the opera:

> *Così fan tutte*—women are all alike—or women are like that—or my own personal favorite translation—women are bathmats.

And then he went on to make the relevant still more relevant:

> Is this the most offensive anti-feminist opera ever written, or an exploration of the outer weird edge of the human psyche? Stay tuned.

There is of course a further, deeply ideological edge to Sellars's proclamation of relevance. Curiously, the clearest statement in words of this edge was left to be expressed by Sellars's costume designer for *The Marriage of Figaro*, Dunya Ramicova. As she was describing on the preview program her intention to use costumes—which included a New York Ranger's uniform for Cherubino—to give a clear and hard edge to the characters, she brought in her reasons for dressing the maid in an old-fashioned black-and-white uniform:

> You know, the Reagan period made this possible, for the rich people to really become rich and the servants to wear those uniforms, for there was a period when the more progressive rich people did not, you know, ask their maids to be dressed in little black outfits with white [caps].

The issue here is not that these operas are themselves pristine and virginal in their content. They are, to begin with, all about sex; the kind of sexual relationships they describe is hardly the ideal of the stable bourgeois family. *The Marriage of Figaro* is about social conflict; the Beaumarchais play on which the opera is based was immediately recognized as attacking, in the critic Ernest Newman's words, "the arrogance and insolence of the aristocracy." *Don Giovanni* raises the question of divine punishment for sexual transgression; furthermore, it does so in the context of sexual exploitation by a member of the aristocracy. *Così fan tutte* does indeed suggest that conventional mores are based on pieties, and that they cannot stand being put to the test. All in all, no one can make the case that these Mozart operas are about sugar and spice.

So the question is not whether these

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operas are about "real life"; they assuredly are. The real issue is whether they are about the transient, though doubtless important, manifestations of contemporary life. Are Donald and Ivana Trump the same as the Viennese Aristocracy? Is the South Bronx the same as feudal Seville? Is a Westchester diner, peopled by customers who find their images of desirable lovers in *GQ* and *Vanity Fair*, the same as Mozart's (and his librettist Lorenzo DaPonte's) never-never-land setting for an abstract comedy of sexual peccadilloes?

The answer to these questions is of course that the particulars of our lives today are so different from what Mozart could have known or imagined that any attempt to force Mozart into a matrix of contemporary social life ineluctably has the effect of betraying the original art work. But more is involved here than a simple corruption of the original. The fact is that updating art works has the effect of depriving these masterpieces of their greatest claim to permanence: the ability to transcend not just the world of today in which we experience them, but, even more important, the contingencies of the world that gave them birth. For in the longest run, *The Marriage of Figaro* surely is not about the Almavivas and their Viennese ilk; *Don Giovanni* is not about pre-modern Seville; *Così fan tutte* is not about the Albanian officers who are tricked into placing a wager on the fidelity of their wives. Because these operas are not really about their original contexts, they are also not about the arrant vulgarity of the Trumps, the racial and economic history of the South Bronx, or the vapidity of the suburbs. These operas, and their stories, are not about what is changeable and particular in life, but rather about what is permanent.

We must accept that art works have two lives: first the life of their origin, and second the life of their transcendence. Man is born, we are told, amidst feces and urine, but our lives are impossible unless we realize that his origins need not determine his aspirations. Art partakes in its creations of every particularity, pleasant and unpleasant alike, of its creators and the world they inhabit, but it is the genius of the greatest art to go beyond even its creators and inhabit a metaphysical world that we may choose to call beauty, truth, or the good. To pin Mozart or any other great art either to its origin, as is urged by the authentic-performance movement in music, or to the moment of its performance, as Sellars so enthusiastically attempts, is to deprive it of the possibility of growing up, of the possibility of exchanging the contingent for the necessary, the timely for the timeless.

How, then, are we to understand Peter Sellars's penchant for bringing Mozart down to "our" level? One important reason for what he does is doubtless his attempt to find a new public for his work. The traditional operatic public—the people who go night after night to the Metropolitan Opera, the Chicago Lyric Opera, and the San Francisco Opera —like the devoted opera fans who buy recordings, do not want their favorites updated; they want them beautifully performed. The public that Sellars has interested himself in is by his own testimony a public that without him would not hear these operas at all. But assuming that self-serving position to be true, one still has the right to ask one question: just what are these innocents hearing in the Sellars productions?

I do not think there can be any doubt that the audience for the Sellars productions is hearing a more or less subtly distorted musical version of these operas. This version is distorted in two ways: first, the singers perforce are singing in a way deeply influenced by the stage direction which Sellars has so ingeniously imposed on them. I referred earlier to the helter-skelter character of the musical performance; that musical character is, after all, nothing less than the mirror image of what is taking place on the stage. There is no getting around it. What happens on the stage deeply affects how the singers sing and what emotions they communicate; everything in the stage direction, no less than everything in the plot, influences how the music is performed. What is true for the performers is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the audience: how the music is heard in opera is

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profoundly determined by what is seen happening on the stage. Stage direction thus influences not just the eye, but also the ear; to maintain otherwise is to negate the very union of image and voice that best characterizes opera as an artistic form.

There is a second reason for what Sellars is doing in these operas. It cannot be forgotten that by attaching himself to Mozart, Sellars is piggybacking the hottest composer of the end of the present century. At this point in our cultural lives, the mere invocation of the name of Mozart is enough to get an audience, legitimize an artistic experiment, and sanctify a performer's reputation. This is merely another way of saying that Sellars is appropriating Mozart to his own purposes, to find an audience for the points about contemporary life that he wishes to make.

That being the case, would it not be more honorable for Sellars to find a new music to clothe his personal vision of life and art? After all, is not newly created work the proper vehicle for statements about the present? To put the matter this way, alas, is only to expose the fact that there is today so little, if any, new music, in opera and elsewhere, that has the power to appeal to an audience and in so doing to carry the weight of directorial ideas. What Sellars needs for his purposes is an association with a composer of memorable music; he did not find such a composer in John Adams, whose *Nixon in China* is as music eminently forgettable. Sellars has found one in Mozart, but that is Mozart's loss, and ours. It is yet another sign of our gathering musical darkness that poor unlucky Mozart, so ill-used during his lifetime, has been reduced to being the handmaiden of a cheeky stage director. What an indignity!

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Theater

Büchner, Ibsen, and Mr. Wilson's highchairs

by Donald Lyons

Romanticism focused upon the feeling subject. That subject opened itself first of all to nature, which served as a laboratory of sensation. Society was all but absent. Romanticism was famously solipsistic. Frequently, the next object for the Romantic was the feeling artist himself, the structure of whose sensing apparatus often proved homomorphic to that of the natural universe.

These general observations are occasioned by some recent productions of plays that stand toward the beginning and toward the end of Romanticism in the theater. The Jean Cocteau Repertory at the Bouwerie Lane Theater in New York staged a double bill of *Leonce and Lena* and *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner (both *c.* 1836) and put on Ibsen's last play, *When We Dead Awaken* (1899). Also, the American Repertory Theatre at the Loeb in Cambridge mounted a version of *When We Dead Awaken.*

It has often been observed that Romanticism produced no great English-speaking theater, in contrast to the rich Romantic drama of France, Germany, and Scandinavia. In the German theater, Büchner (1813-1837) is a haunting case. Dead at twenty-three, he saw none of his plays (*Danton's Death*, *Leonce and Lena*, *Woyzeck*) produced. *Leonce and Lena* premiered in 1895; *Woyzeck* in 1913. Like the equally *maudit* Kleist, Büchner was a second-generation German Romantic and incorporated in his work parodistic critiques of the High Romanticism of forebears like Goethe and Schiller. *Leonce and Lena* is, in form, a short *commedia dell'arte* about the heir to the Kingdom of Popo, Leonce, and the heiress to the Kingdom of Pipi, Lena. Betrothed to each other sight unseen, they separately rebel against imprisoning destiny and flee "south," where they encounter each other in the purity of nature and fall in love. Into the old bottle is poured new liquor. *As You Like It* meets Thomas Peacock. Leonce is an epigrammatizing poseur, drawling speeches that seem to combine Hamlet, Byron's Don Juan, and Wilde's Algernon. He perches on a bench and monologizes: "My life is an empty dance hall." He finds his saucy mistress's lips "lazy," rejects the trite Romantic temptation to Napoleonic heroism, and chases after his ideal of a wholly beautiful, wholly stupid woman by heading south (his rapturous voyage-speech a hilarious parody of the Goethean *Drang nach Süden*). His servant Valerio dogs him throughout, echoing in a minor, traditionally cynical key his master's queer mixture of idealistic longing and disillusionment. All Valerio wants from the South is wine and roasts. Once in "nature," Leonce sees the ants as a paradigm of the ideal life in that they do no work, for in life the only good way to get money is to inherit it or find it or win it in a lottery. Valerio approves of nature except for mosquitoes.

Princess Lena, meanwhile, disdains being merely "the water of the well that must willy-nilly give back the image of whoever peers in

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it," and tries to escape her destiny. When she first overhears Leonce in the moonlight, he is indulging in a pouting bout of Byronic melancholy ("The world is so young and I am so old"). It proves contagious, and she is soon comparing the moon to a dead child and a lifeless angel. They fall in love; they kiss; he tries, in an ecstasy of bliss and a frisson of Goethean parody, to throw himself in the river; Valerio snatches him back. Leonce then stretches on the grass, muttering, "You've cheated me of suicide. Even the weather was excellent. Now I'm not in the mood."

In the final scene back at court, Valerio makes all well by functioning as a playwright himself, dressing up the lovers as masked automata to convince the court of the randomness of fate. Büchner boldly and as it were offhandedly summarizes here the great Romantic theme of artistic reflexivity. At the close, Leonce describes his dawning utopia —a world of music and theater with no time and no winter, an eternal Ischia or Capri full of roses and oranges. Valerio's comic antiphon looks forward to macaroni and "classical bodies" and "a consoling religion." This jewel of a play was done with spirit by the Cocteau's resident acting company under the direction of Robert Hupp; Mark Waterman's Leonce and Joseph Menino's Valerio stood out, but in general the cast was not able to master the complex diction, or rather the complexity of tone behind the diction. George Xenos's set—a floor and doors of black-and-white diamond lozenges—gave a fittingly festive *commedia* look. The translation was Eric Bentley's, from the 1950s.

On the same bill was Mr. Bentley's new translation of *Woyzeck*, the play about an army barber who slays his promiscuous common-law wife. In its staccato construction, its coarse language, its relentless insistence upon the fact that the poor cannot afford morality or religion or the other shams of the rich and powerful, *Woyzeck* anticipates not only much of Brecht but whole reams of modern expression and sentiment. It is a strong, bitter, angry play, and the company was much more up to it than they were to *Leonce and Lena* The staging by Robert Hupp was fluid and mysterious and shocking. A huge mirror depended over the stage, doubling the action and its choric witnesses. Woyzeck (superbly played by Craig Smith) danced with the corpse of Marie (the capable Elise Stone) to the old German folk tune "There Is a Tavern on the Rhine." At the end, as fog streamed through a watery light, the folk of the community surrounded the killer as he tried to wash off the blood in the water of a pond.

Mr. Bentley was present at the Sunday afternoon performance I saw and explained to the audience afterwards that it was only in the 1980s that a definitive text of *Woyzeck* was established (specifically, in 1984, in Leipzig, by Henri Poschmann), which he has freshly translated. He now regards the play not as a "fragment" but as 95 percent complete—as, in essence, what Büchner wanted. He and his collaborators found and inserted contemporary German songs. He noted such major revisions from earlier *Woyzeck* texts as the barber scene's (in which Woyzeck and the Captain discuss morality and class) coming not first but only after the Barker and the Showman peddle their cynical wares at the local fair. He pointed out, too, that in the new text, Woyzeck does not drown (any more than did Leonce!) but must face society.

The Büchner double bill was a thought-provoking and civilizing theater experience, and extremely rare as such. The Jean Cocteau Repertory attempts to scale remote and tough peaks, and they have an intelligent sense of the difficulties involved. There is no flavor of scrabbled-together amateurishness about their work, but rather the aroma of thought and practice. And if they were not up to the verbal gymnastics of *Leonce and Lena*, they did *Woyzeck* justice. And the following week they did justice also to *When We Dead Awaken*, by Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), a play that comes late in the day of Romantic dramaturgy and recapitulates many familiar topics. If *Leonce and Lena* is a Mozart divertimento, *When We Dead Awaken* is a Mahler

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song cycle. If Büchner had something of the quicksilver lightness of Byron's best work, *Don Juan*, Ibsen manifested the solemn, ponderous self-absorption (and commingling with the cosmos) of Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Ibsen was seventy-one when he wrote this last play, a stark and somewhat deranged meditation upon art and sex and life and death. It was a play that dazzled the eighteen-year-old James Joyce, who published an article on it on April 1, 1900, in *The Fortnightly Review*. Ibsen responded with (literally) *a* word of thanks, only to have Joyce send back a long letter of abject devotion and sly self-exaltation ("I am a young, a very young man. . . . I have sounded your name defiantly. . . . I have claimed for you your rightful place in the history of drama").

An old sculptor, Rubek, and his wife, Maja, sit at a coastal spa desultorily discussing the inadequacies and dissatisfactions of their marriage. He reads a newspaper and can barely force himself to listen and respond to his wife's unhappy questioning. Why has he insisted on returning from a plush exile to this, his bleak native country? Does he know how she detests this place? Why has he not fulfilled his promise, on marrying her, to take her up to the mountains and show her the glories of the world (blasphemous biblical echo very much intended)? Rubek's replies are evasive, laconic, sarcastic. He has to explain to Maja that his sought-after portrait sculptures are, though not perceived as such, in fact savage, animalistic caricatures of the respectable types who commission them. (This, as critics quickly notice, is clearly Our Master's Voice speaking through the mask of Rubek.) The ill-matched pair move on to a mountain resort, where Maja is captivated by the crudely brutal and macho Ulfhejm, hunter "of beasts and of women." There then drifts onto the scene Irina, a former model for Rubek who had served, she believed, as the centerpiece for his masterpiece, *Day of Resurrection*. She is a dreamy, enigmatic, yet fiercely angry figure, perhaps mad (she is accompanied by a wardenlike nun with a strait jacket), perhaps a murderer (she speaks of having done away with two husbands), perhaps dead (she talks of having died and wakened transformed; she wears a miniature casket; etc.), perhaps a dream of Rubek's, perhaps a summons to death (a sort of Tadzio *avant la lettre*). She berates Rubek for *not* having made love to her, for having killed the life in her, for having been "only an artist, not a man." She defiantly rejects the status of Muse. Art is, to her, but a museum or a cemetery; she wants instead "life." Rubek shamefacedly confesses to Irina that he in fact enlarged *Day of Resurrection*, shoving her "radiantly virginal" figure off-center and surrounding it with an animalistic swarming mass of celebrants. (Apparently, she was to have been a defiantly pagan Jesus-substitute. The defiant paganism remains, but she is sculpturally marginalized.) She receives this news with ill grace, calling him soft and lazy and self-forgiving, in a word, a poet. He ripostes by calling her an "episode" in his life. As the sun sets, they subside into a trancelike mutual absorption with birds and petals and clouds.

The last act takes place just below the mountaintop as a storm gathers. Maja and her stud, basking in earthy carnality, are descending the mountain to shelter. Maja exults that she is free, that she has awakened —rough sex is her ticket to life. While descending, they encounter Rubek and Irina ascending. Rubek has seen the error of his ways: "I put a dead clay model above the joys of life." He has now decided, somewhat confusingly, to embrace said joys by striding deathward into the storm. Irina is ecstatically at one with him in this lust to ascend, to attain the intensest experience of life, which is death: "My desire to live is gone; I am risen; I am free." Up they go. So . . . sex is good and art is fake. Or life is good and art is death. But life is death and death is life. Or snow is up and sex is down. Or different strokes for different folks.

But Ibsen has, so to speak, earned these dark ambiguities. Logic kneels before his power. One can cite his incoherencies (as Nietzsche did those of *Parsifal*) and yet recognize in his stony ferocity and theatrically imposing monumentality a wintry genius

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wrestling with titanic demons. (And the first act deserves a more mundane recognition for the way it exactly and drolly catches the juiceless, acrid rhythms of a failed marriage.) And this elemental power of Ibsen's was gotten on the tiny Bouwerie Lane stage under Eve Adamson's uncluttered but never lifelessly schematic direction. Sara Waterbury's set —mirrors, a pillar, a bust, two chairs, a table, "sheets" of snow—struck a pleasing balance between abstract and naturalistic. Craig Smith's Rubek, full of coiled sarcasm and unlocked anguish, had the power the role demands. Elise Stone's Maja was sharp and funny, but Angela Vitale seemed rigidly rhetorical and boringly statuesque in the (perhaps unactable) role of Irina. The superbly speakable translation of Rolf Fjelde was used.

The American Repertory Theatre offered *When We Dead Awaken* in an English version by Robert Brustein, the Artistic Director, as "adapted and directed by Robert Wilson." Mr. Wilson, the well-known furniture designer, has worked at the A.R.T. before (Heiner Müller's *Quartet*; parts of the day-long opera called *the CIVIL warS*; *Alcestis*), and Mr. Brustein was eager to get him back. In an article in the company's house-organ, the *A.R.T. News*, Mr. Brustein says Ibsen was not the first choice. It seems Mr. Wilson wanted "to do a version of *The Wasteland* [*sic*] but T. S. Eliot's widow wouldn't release the rights." Way to go, Mrs. Eliot! Then they looked at *Our Town*. No dice. And then the "imposing mountains and rivers" that had adorned *Alcestis* turned Mr. Brustein's thoughts to *When We Dead Awaken*. A tiny problem occurred to the Artistic Director: ". . . the play was full of words, and Wilson's way with words was notoriously unorthodox. Recognizing that some translators might not be entirely happy with the way this director liked to rearrange a text, I volunteered to do the English version myself." "The major task," he allows, "was to cut away everything extraneous, repetitive, or explanatory. . . . I ended with a text about half the length of the original. . . . It is our hope that those familiar with the play will tolerate the loss of some of its fatty tissue in return for what we expect will be a deep penetration of its spirit." There, there, Henrik, you won't feel a thing . . . just 50 percent, I assure you . . . oh, was that your heart? was that your brain? never mind . . .

The breathtaking impudence of this butchery of the final, dense, tortured, beautiful text of one of the world's most meticulous craftsmen of the stage beggars comment. (I was unclear, amid all the explication, whether Mr. Brustein knows Norwegian or in effect reworked existing versions. I thought I heard some Rolf Fjelde renderings but it was, as will be told, hard to tell for sure.) Mr. Brustein positions himself as the good cop in this affair, however, for, as Robert Scanlan, the A.R.T. Literary Director, informs us in yet another *News* item (did ever a production come cocooned in so much apologetic writing?), "Wilson would willingly go that extra distance, well into the silence, letting language drop away as a useless appendage." Even more radical surgery from the A.R.T. Emergency Medical Team was, we are to note happily, thus narrowly averted.

Now that I've sat through the Wilson Ibsen, I wish they had gone the whole hog surgery-wise. Or at least they could have anesthetized the audience. Every minute was literal, physical agony. In the first half, two people (I will not give these vestigial beings characters' names) sat in enormously, taperingly tall wicker chairs that rotate—very, very slowly—about the stage. They mouthed tonelessly (at first) discrete and meaningless snippets of the script (I will never forget one where a woman describes the banality of rural train stations). These snippets are then repeated by other personages, by mikes offstage, and with ever-increasing shrill vocalic distortion. Nonsense fragments of dialogue were deconstructed into their constituent phonemes, and the phonemes cacophonically dinned into one's ears. This torture was called "sound environment by Hans Peter Kuhn." In the second part, a man sat in a high, high throne, like a wicked king in a fairy

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tale, whilst various women (roles were, I gather, doubled and halved and bifurcated) ululated incomprehensibly and balanced spears on their heads. Syllables were screeched into the apparently ubiquitous mikes (in this as in other things it resembled a lousy Broadway musical—specifically, the vulgar *Aspects of Love*, which also featured moving mountains). I soon took a cue from my neighbor, who began sticking her fingers into her ears. Eventually the man came off this throne; he inched down with difficulty, in fact. The throne then inched offstage. More ululating. Storm noises aplenty. Fingers in ears aplenty. Paper snow wafted down. One of the women screamed: "I am free; the prison is open for me." You said it, sister, I thought, and bolted for Brattle Street while I could still hear.

Interspersed through the evening were three blues songs written and sung and danced with great simplicity and sweetness by veteran jazzman Charles "Honi" Coles (he was joined in his softshoe routines by cast members). They were funky little tunes with no relation to Ibsen but with irresistible lyrics like "She was so well stacked / so round and fully packed / But the charms in my arms came from the store." They were by far the most human—no, they were the only human—moments in the show, but their coy placement amid so much that was so dissonant from them was disingenuous and disconcerting and left an impression of condescension toward the "primitive."

The Boston Museum of Fine Arts is currently exhibiting a three-room show called "Robert Wilson's Vision." It opens with a dark corridor decorated with high-contrast photographs of statuary in Berlin parks; this leads into a bright room hung with dangling chairs, benches, and tables from Wilson *opera*. A dimmer room has walls hung with stage drawings and in a private chamber a huge, kitschy elephant's foot commemorating a statue erected by Napoleon on the site of the Bastille, where now rises a new opera house that has hired Mr. Wilson. The final room is dark; more furniture litters the floor while, the length of one wall, glows and boings a pinball-like "spaceship interior." The "sound environment" throughout was again by Mr. Kuhn: telephones ringing, storms, Callas, *King Lear*, etc.

What Mr. Wilson can do, it is evident from the Loeb and from the Fine Arts, is make chairs—not chairs for use to be sure, but Lewis Carroll nightmares of chairs. He is a sketcher of dream chairs, a hypnokleismograph, to coin a word. It is a tiny gift.

His work as a whole, moreover, exudes something unpleasant: a dry-ice coldness, a laconic superiority to human content, a destructive formalism smelling of illiteracy and thinness of culture and a desire to intimidate. Mr. Wilson's work seems indeed less a spontaneous, self-generated artifact than a commissioned series of attempts to illustrate certain notions popularized in the Sixties about the destruction of masterpieces. One thinks of the vogue for the glamorous Artaud and his Theater of Cruelty—which was of course even for Artaud a mere notion, a willed idea he never came near realizing. Clever Mr. Wilson has managed only the Cruelty; he has forgotten the Theater. "I hate ideas," he predictably told *The New York Times*; "I don't like most of Ibsen's plays," he told the *A.R.T. News*. Wilson is the ashes of Artaud's fire.

Poor Ibsen. Shame on the A.R.T. and their boastful subventioner, AT&T, for treating the old man the way Saddam Hussein treated Kuwait.

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Art

Fauvists as tourists

by Jed Perl

"The Fauve Landscape," currently at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, presents a murky, soft-focus view of a bright, clear moment in the history of modern art.[1] Judi Freeman, who organized the show for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, has taken what she calls a "site-specific" approach to her subject. This means that she has grouped paintings by Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck, Dufy, Marquet, Braque, and a number of other artists in terms of the locales that they depict —and where, as these are for the most part paintings done directly from nature, they were done. At the Met this results in a series of galleries with captions posted high on the walls that read "Paris," "Suburbs of Paris," "St. Tropez," "Collioure," "Normandy," and so forth. It's a sort of meandering tour of places where bohemian artists lived or visited in the period 1904-1908. It's the if-this-is-summer-1905-this-must-be-Matisse-in-Collioure view of art history. While the show is undoubtedly historically accurate, it gives an insidiously picturesque view of a moment when at least a couple of the artists—Matisse and Derain—were taking a leap into the artistic unknown. The geographic approach (and the large number of less-than-scintillating canvases included in the show) has the effect of muffling the impact of major works.

Before you come to the paintings that Matisse and Derain did at Collioure, you go through a room that is dominated by the work that Henri Manguin and Louis Valtat did at St. Tropez. I understand that these lesser-known artists are part of the historical picture, but a painting or two a piece, discreetly displayed, would have made that point. Their work is syrupy stuff—it seems included mainly in order to make points about the summer-vacation itinerary—and it leaves a museumgoer woozy. In this context, the jewel-bright Matisse paintings are nearly turned into a few more sentimental souvenirs of the crowd-free days in the South of France. The exhibition documents the charms of vacation spots of the past: the beaches with their brightly striped tents, the bustle of fishermen in the little Mediterranean ports. Yet once Freeman has set the focus on local geography early in the show, it can begin to seem as if Fauvism is just an outgrowth of the spirit of place (of a lot of places). This could make the show a popular hit. (And the corporate sponsor, the Ford Motor Company, cannot be unhappy with the message that vacationing is vital to creativity.)

I do not mean to suggest that a particular landscape never played a role in the history of modern art. Southern France provided Van

1 "The Fauve Landscape" is now on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (February 19-May 5, 1991). The exhibition originated at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (October 4-December 30, 1990) and will travel to the Royal Academy of Arts, London (June 10-September 1, 1991). A catalogue by Judi Freeman, Associate Curator of Twentieth-Century Art at LACMA, has been published by LACMA/Abbeville Press (350 pages, $65; $35 paper).

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Gogh and Cézanne, each in a very different way, with scenery that gave concrete form to a romantic yearning for new experiences of color and space and light. In the first decade of the new century, when Matisse and Derain—and then, a couple of years later, Braque and Picasso—were pushing into yet more radical apprehensions of color and space, getting away from Paris, burying oneself in the distinct scenery of some rural spot, undoubtedly helped the artists to let loose. Derain spoke of the "blond, golden light" at Collioure, and one sees it in the painting (though more in Matisse's than in Derain's). But for Matisse and Derain, who were the essential Fauves, a particular landscape never had the talismanic significance that places had for many of the Postimpressionists. (Matisse's experience in Morocco is something different: what he found there was as much a matter of a different culture as of a different geography.) It was the Postimpressionists who discovered that a picture could feel spacious even if it didn't have the look of a three-dimensional space. Matisse wasn't so much pushing the implications of a particular landscape as he was pushing the implications of the Postimpressionists' new sense of freedom in relation to the landscape. But the way that "The Fauve Landscape" is arranged downplays the imaginative leap that's taking place within the work. What Matisse proved at Collioure was that the aliveness of painting could be maintained in a non-illusionistic painting if the surface was alive with color.

Judi Freeman's pedantic contextual approach to Fauvism has its ideological axe to grind: it's anti-formalist. So it is no wonder that Matisse—who wrote one of the clarion calls of formalism in his 1908 "Notes of a Painter"—disappears into the Freeman scheme. I didn't see the show in Los Angeles; but at least some people who saw it there seem to have reacted the way I reacted to the arrangement in New York—they felt that the exhibition robbed the Fauve revolution of its force and forward thrust. I suspect that the people who run the Metropolitan Museum of Art (and spell modern art in their own odd way: B-L-O-C-K-B-U-S-T-E-R) don't care if Matisse makes an impression or not. All that matters is that his name has box-office appeal—it will bring people in. This is another one of the Met's crowd-control installations. The galleries may be big enough to hold the people who will come to see the show, but they're much too big for the paintings that are on display. In order to give a sense of proportion to the rooms, the walls have been painted in some of the Met's signature hideous shades: depression gray and a dark tint of park-bench green. (Matisse's Collioure triumphs are deadened by that green.) The whole thing is institutional-sepulchral; for people who come expecting light, color, joy, it can be a terrible shock.

Fauvism came into being not in front of a landscape during a summer vacation, but in October 1905, in Room 7 of the Salon d'Automne in Paris. Fauvism's essential icon wasn't even a landscape—it was a portrait of Madame Matisse in a flowered hat. It was the critic Louis Vauxcelles who, looking at the works of Matisse, Derain, and Vlaminck in Room 7, came up with the idea of calling these artists "*les fauves*"—the wild beasts. Matisse, later on, said that he (Matisse) "has no idea what 'fauvism' means." That was probably Matisse's attempt to distance himself from other people's views of a history that he had every reason to feel was his own to feel about as he pleased; but one can easily leave "The Fauve Landscape" having no particular idea of what Fauvism means, either. As John Elderfield observed in his catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art's 1976 show "Fauvism and its Affinities," "The Fauvist movement, it could be said, was the result of public and critical reactions to the artists' work." As is so often the case in the history of modern art, a critic who was out to knock some new innovation came up with a characterization that was ultimately embraced by those who wanted to see that innovation as another essential step in the evolution of modern art.

I think that Judi Freeman basically still believes in the falling-domino theory of modern art: in the idea that Impressionism begat

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Postimpressionism which begat Fauvism which begat Cubism, in a seemingly inevitable development leading to abstract art. She concludes "The Fauve Landscape" with a Cubist painting by Braque. That ending is unnerving. It says, "Okay, that's it for Fauvism. Now for the next major movement in modern art!" (Braque, at least from the paintings included here, doesn't become an especially interesting artist until Fauvism is just about over.) Freeman probably believes that she's freshening up the old domino theory with her postmodern contextualism. But her sentimental journey through turn-of-the-century France robs the orthodox modernist approach of the one thing it had: its propulsive forward movement, its sense of the history of modern art as a race toward abstraction. Freeman doesn't expand our understanding of underrated and misunderstood artists such as Marquet and Dufy, she just uses them as contextualization, as decorative frills.

At "The Fauve Landscape," I find myself thinking of the artists one by one. If there's a virtue to be found in this ill-conceived show, it's that by mismanaging the subject, Freeman leaves the artists to fend for themselves. When I look at the beautiful paintings by Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck, Dufy, Marquet, and other artists who are included in this exhibition, I think of each canvas in relation to the artist's own later (and earlier) work, and to the artists they were inspired by and in turn inspired. Marquet's silvery gray Parisian views give a modern inflection to the elegiac spirit of Claude and Corot. (Poor Marquet—whose landscapes are the most pellucid produced in our century—when will he get his due?) In the Fauve years, Derain is an exciting, terrifically talented, unpredictable artist. He's the most explosively, movingly Expressionist of the artists included here. (A thought about Derain's work after World War I. Perhaps Derain's dream of reinventing himself as a paragon of French classicism failed because he was always, at heart, the paragon of French Romanticism.) Vlaminck is another Expressionist, and he has the vice of so many modern Expressionists—he turns everything he looks at into egocentric brushwork. (I think he is sometimes a better artist after the Fauve period, when he uses his strokes of the palette knife to mix grays and browns and jolts of white paint in an Expressionist view of the serene French countryside.) As for Dufy, there are hints, all through the Fauve years, of the airy magic of his later work: he already understands that there's a modern Rococo hidden inside Postimpressionism. (And that Dufy's popular fame today should be on Matisse's coattails: this is another injustice.)

And then there is Matisse. He is the most classical artist who is the most Romantic artist. In his work classicism plus Romanticism equals modernity. It's a great equation. When Matisse observed of Ingres and Delacroix that "They forged the same links in the chain," he knew whereof he spoke. In the paintings that Matisse did at Collioure, classicism is joined with a Romanticism that has turned into Expressionism. It is through this development of extreme oppositions that Matisse's Fauve paintings achieve their electric equilibrium. They are far and away the most radical of the Fauve paintings; but they are also the most balanced, integrated, serene. During that summer at Collioure, Matisse pushed way, way beyond naturalistic color. But by opposing his full-out reds and blues and greens and yellows and oranges to one another in a rigorously lyrical manner, he achieved something very rare: balance within imbalance. Matisse knew that the paintings he did at Collioure were finished—so he explained later on—when "I got the feeling that I had created a complete harmony on my canvas and had acquitted myself of the emotion that had made me undertake it." Matisse brings together many different moods in these Collioure paintings. These paintings offer one definition of completeness, a definition to go with the definitions to be found in the paintings of Chardin and Delacroix and Corot and Seurat. Yet at "The Fauve Landscape" the Matisses cannot shine forth. Matisse cannot be a part of this trip down Memory Lane.

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Books

Quisling criticism: the case of Paul de Man

by James W. Tuttleton

"Considerations of the actual and historical existence of writers are a waste of time from a critical viewpoint"—so wrote Paul de Man, the distinguished Yale professor and literary critic who, at the time of his death in 1983, was widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in American academic criticism. His several volumes—especially *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971, revised 1983) and *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (1979)—did as much as any other such theoretical work to install deconstructionism as the regnant critical methodology in American universities.

Deriving his approach from the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who had posited an absolute gap or fissure between language and the objects and events of the world it purports to represent, Paul de Man formulated a deconstructionist criticism that banished history and biography from any consideration in the analysis of literary works. Genres also disappeared in de Man's critical approach: he took every kind of writing—literary or otherwise—as mere *écriture*, or discourse, and subjected it to a formalist analysis of its rhetorical strategies, tropes, and figures. Rhetorical analysis, de Man argued, always "allows for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding." The import of the text is thus so "problematized" that nothing can be unequivocally said about it. To make an absolute claim about the sense of a text is totalitarian. For, as one of de Man's disciples remarked—in what will become, as we go on, an odd political juxtaposition—"meaning is fascist."

De Man was quite specific in declaring that "*the paradigmatic structure of language is rhetorical* rather than representational or expressive of a referential, proper meaning"; this recognition, he argued, marks "*a full reversal of the established priorities* which traditionally root the authority of the language in its adequation to an extralinguistic referent or meaning rather than in the intralinguistic resources of figures."

This reversal of priorities—especially in binary oppositions where the first of a pair of terms is "privileged" (like good and evil, the spirit and the flesh, presence and absence, light and dark)—was a favorite method of deconstructionist analysis. Freed now from history and biography, de Man and his disciples were at liberty to cite the binary oppositions evident in a work, to make the secondary term primary, to transpose the marginal to the center, and to claim that the work itself meant the opposite of (or at least "called into question") the very manifest meaning it appeared to convey. Without doubt the method produced original readings. Yet at the heart of most of them was a breathtaking perverseness or cynicism.

Even so, deconstructionism as a mode of

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literary criticism took the American universities by storm. No department was worth its salt if it didn't feature a few resident deconstructionists out to prove that the rhetoric or figural language of a text subverted its declared intention. *Othello*, we were told, was not about jealousy but about the indeterminacy of language. *The Scarlet Letter* was not about the consequences of adultery but about the ambiguity of letters.

Literary historians, biographers, psychoanalytic critics, and American Studies devotees protested against the deconstructionist exclusion of other critical approaches serving to aid us in understanding what a work of literature means. And those for whom literature has a didactic function—in teaching readers about the real world—claimed that deconstructionism was essentially a nihilist literary enterprise. But de Man and his disciples were resolute: all writing is rhetorical rather than representational; literary authority inheres in the discourse itself, not in the author, who doesn't exist—since language speaks the writer; the barriers said to separate genres are arbitrary constructions and may be disposed of; everything, the world itself, is a text or discourse; nevertheless, the meaning of this discourse is undecidable because texts are always subverting, slyly, whatever they seem to say.

Deconstructionism is then, as the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has observed in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, like Marxism, Nietzcheism, and Freudianism: it is a hermeneutics of suspicion; it has as its intention the unmasking or the stripping away of the merely apparent; its objective is the demystification of what linguistically *seems*, in favor of an announcement of what *is*. In the case of deconstructionism, that which *is* always turns out to be the bankruptcy of all metaphysics, the collapse of the whole tradition of Western intellectual thought, because it is "logocentric" or founded on a faith in language and a theology of meaning.

What invariably emerges from deconstructionist criticism is an assault on the rational principle itself, as language endeavors to express it. Every effort is made in this criticism to subvert the meaning said to be expressed in literary texts because language and reason provide no stable ground for certitude. Thus we reach very quickly, in this criticism, what the deconstructionist J. Hillis Miller calls "the abyss of 'annihilation.'" Staring into this abyss—the meaningless of meaning—apparently gives the deconstructionist some kind of thrill. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a translator of Derrida and practicing deconstructionist in her own right, has announced that "The fall into the abyss of deconstruction inspires us with as much pleasure as fear. We are intoxicated with the prospect of never hitting bottom." And Jonathan Culler commends the excitement of sawing off the philosophical limb one sits on. Others will know this attempt to subvert rationality by subverting language for what it is—the latest form of nihilism.

One of the merits of David Lehman's new study, *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man*,[1] is his precise formulation of the doctrines of deconstructionism and his engaging account of how it has trickled down into the chitchat of our popular culture. Mercifully, the description of this abstruse critical phenomenon by Lehman, a poet and journalist who covered this story in *Newsweek* as it broke, is written in clear, precise, jargon-free English. (Most deconstructionist criticism is clotted, neologistic, sophomorically pun-filled, and unreadable.) Yet the lucidity of Lehman's account of the complicated ideas of de Man and Jacques Derrida, and Lehman's wit and humor, result in no oversimplification of this critical school and its adherents. In fact, one of the pleasures this book is witnessing Lehman unfold, one by one, the principles of this critical method and his exposure of the logical absurdities that issue into deconstuctionist practical criticism. As a result, this book is bound to become required reading for anyone who wants to know about decon-

1 *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man*, by David Lehman; Poseidon Press, 318 pages, $21.95.

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structionism and its principal American practitioner, Paul de Man.

Paul de Man died in 1983. At the memorial service in New Haven, faculty, students, and friends acclaimed the man and his work. His sweet and gentle manner, originality of mind, rigor of thought, modesty of bearing, the sheer authority of his pronouncements were celebrated, as was his skill in debate. A festschrift, *The Lesson of Paul de Man*, was quickly assembled by his colleagues; and Jacques Derrida dedicated one of his books to his memory, *Mémoires: for Paul de Man*. One of his admirers, Barbara Johnson, remarked that "In a profession full of fakeness, he was real."

But if *Signs of the Times* deals with the triumph of Paul de Man's career as a deconstructionist in America, it also recounts the story of his dizzying fall from high reputation. The story of de Man's fakery is breathtaking in the stunning revelations about his secret life. Equally troubling, however, is the disturbing defense of the man by those who had most to lose in allowing us to become disillusioned with him and his work.

In 1987, knowing of his national ancestry, Ortwin de Graef, a young Belgian scholar, undertook to research Paul de Man's European publications. The de Man family was well known in Belgium, especially Paul's uncle, Hendrik de Man, who had attained recognition in intellectual circles for his political activism and for theoretical publications like *The Psychology of Socialism* (1926). But Hendrik de Man became *persona non grata* to many Belgians during the war because he had, as Lehman puts it, "welcomed the Nazi conquest of Belgium." In the view of Paul de Man's uncle, an authoritarian Nazi takeover of Belgium, as well as of other European countries, was essential to the imposition of a national socialism of the kind he advocated.

In the course of his research, Ortwin de Graef turned up some 170 newspaper articles that Paul de Man had written, between 1940 and 1942, for *Le Soir*, the largest Belgian daily newspaper, and *Het Vlaamsche Land*, a Flemish daily. Both newspapers during that period were propaganda organs for the Nazi occupiers, who had overrun Belgium and taken control of the media. In uncovering these old de Man publications, the admirer de Graef was stunned by what he discovered: Paul de Man himself had collaborated with the Nazis. For these ostensibly literary articles, in the words of John Brenkman, revealed that

> De Man responded, consistently and actively, to an entire range of ideological imperatives associated with European fascism and political imperatives specifically dictated by the Third Reich.

The de Man articles take an unmistakably collaborationist view of the German defeat of Belgium and her occupation. Among other things, de Man called the German invasion "a revolution" that "aims at organizing European society in a more equitable manner." Identifying Hitler with the German spirit, de Man remarked that "the whole continuity of Western civilization depends on the unity of the people [the Germans] who are its center." Particularly offensive was "The Jews in Contemporary Literature," an article that appeared in *Le Soir* on March 4, 1941. In this article, de Man addressed the influence of Jewish writers on European culture. De Man dismissed their contribution as insignificant in relation to the grand historical evolution of the European mind—as manifest, presumably, in the more intelligent writing of unnamed Aryan authors.

Moreover, he remarked that "Western intellectuals" would be able to take comfort from the mediocrity of the Jewish writers:

> That they [the intellectuals] have been able to safeguard themselves from Jewish influence in a domain as culturally representative as literature proves their vitality. We could not have much hope for the future of our civilization if it had let itself be invaded, without resistance, by a foreign force. In keeping its originality and its character intact, despite Semitic interference in all aspects of European life, our civilization has shown that its fundamental nature is healthy. What's more, one can thus see that a solution to

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> the Jewish problem that would lead to the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe would not have, for the literary life of the West, regrettable consequences. It would lose, in all, some personalities of mediocre worth and would continue, as in the past, to develop according to its higher laws of evolution.

Such views, obnoxious now, were at that time in murderous accord with the strident anti-Semitism of *Le Soir* and *Het Vlaamsche Land*, which, according to Lehman, blamed the war on the Jews—paradoxically on "Jewish Bolsheviks in league with Jewish capitalists"! That anti-Semitism was the official policy of these newspapers, then under the direct control of the Nazis, cannot be doubted. (The prewar editorial staff and contributors had been sacked and replaced by quislings.) Paul de Man's many articles were surrounded by others equally obnoxious. This comment is typical of the *Le Soir* position: "We are determined to forbid ourselves any cross-breeding with them [the Jews] and to liberate ourselves spiritually from their demoralizing influence in the realm of thought, literature, and the arts." The fact of the matter is that this so-called "liberation" from Jewish influence had already begun to take place. As Lehman rightly remarks,

> the systematic persecution of the Jews was as clearly evident in Belgium as in the rest of Nazi Europe when he [Paul de Man] wrote for *Le Soir*. Jews in Belgium were banned from the civil service, the press, the practice of law, and the teaching profession by a decree issued in October 1940 that went into effect at the end of that year.

But the fate of Belgian Jews was of course to become worse with the "Final Solution": it translated random brutalization and murder into systematic annihilation in the gas chambers.

For reasons that are not apparent now, Paul de Man stopped contributing to these quisling newspapers in 1942. But his collaboration with the Nazi enemy did not go unnoticed by the Belgian resistance, for in 1943 de Man was one of a number of *Le Soir* contributors who were denounced in a pamphlet called *Galerie des Traitres* (Gallery of Traitors). One of de Man's fellow contributors to *Le Soir* was in fact assassinated by the resistance, and de Man himself appears to have escaped death largely because his writing was more literary than political. In 1945, after the liberation of Belgium, a military tribunal in Antwerp summoned de Man for interrogation. It is interesting to speculate on what his defense of this wartime collaboration with the Germans might have been. What we do know is that de Man was released without charges; the tribunal was after larger fish. (His uncle Hendrik, who had fled the country, was convicted, in absentia, by a military tribunal on a charge of treason.) The recent republication of de Man's various articles [2] validates Lehman's irrefutable claim that he was a Nazi sympathizer and that his journalism was part of "a concerted campaign to vilify the Jews as agents of cultural decadence."

Here, in Ortwin de Graef's discovery of these articles, was a scandal indeed: one of the most distinguished professors of comparative literature in America, and an internationally recognized spokesman for deconstructionism, a man who supposedly had many Jewish friends at Yale, had been a Fascist collaborator. The news about de Man, now seen to be the Kurt Waldheim of literary criticism, hit New Haven like a bombshell. This was as stunning as the Martin Heidegger revelations. How could de Man have been a Fascist? Whenever people at Yale had asked him about the war years, de Man told them—as Lehman reports it—that "he'd

2 *Wartime Journalism, 1939-1943*, by Paul de Man, edited by Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan; University of Nebraska Press, 399 pages, $35; $15.95 paper. The outcry over the revelation of these articles led to a symposium of papers published in 1989 as *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, also edited by Messrs. Hamacher, Hertz, and Keenan (University of Nebraska Press, 477 pages, $40; $19.95 paper).

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gone to England and worked as a translator, or that he'd studied in Paris, or that he'd joined the underground in France—three palpable falsehoods."

These revelations put Paul de Man's life under the microscope, and other scandalous aspects of his youth came to light. It appears that he was married during the war years to a Romanian expatriate, Anaide Baraghian, who bore him three sons. After the war, he had founded Editions Hermès, a publishing house that failed. When a lawsuit threatened, de Man is said to have absconded, financially ruining his father and leaving his creditors stranded. Georges Goriely, a Belgian who knew him in those years, later said that "Swindling, forging, lying were, at least at the time, second nature to him." Sending his wife and children to Argentina, de Man sailed to America to start a new life, and here he rose to the high eminence I have described. But de Man never sent for his family in Argentina. He cut off all contact with them and, shortly after arriving in America, married one of his American students and fathered a daughter. His friends at Yale knew nothing about this family in Argentina, and the later revelation to his American family that he had a wife and children in South America appears also to have been a shock. Was de Man a bigamist, or was the relationship to Anaide merely a liaison with no legal standing? Although we may never know, his abandonment of his European family and creditors raised serious questions about his integrity.

To defend his integrity, de Man's friends at Yale and elsewhere were obliged to account for his actions. Particularly they had to explain his curious silence about his wartime past during the American years. Furthermore, the academic community found itself inflamed over a second question—whether there is an intellectual relationship between de Man's Fascist sympathies and the development of deconstructionism as a critical method. The conclusion of Lehman's study is a brilliant examination of how the friends and enemies of deconstructionism and Paul de Man responded to Ortwin de Graef's surprising revelations. As with any meeting of the faculty, the spectacle is not edifying, but Lehman's splendid narrative of the matter is illuminating.

As to the question about de Man's silence, several surprising speculations were advanced. Geoffrey Hartman, a friend and professor at Yale, though no deconstructionist himself, explained de Man's silence as "a refusal to exonerate himself; he would live with his guilt instead of making excuses and pleading for forgiveness."[3] But how can we know that de Man felt any guilt? By a logic that escapes me, Hartman argued that de Man's work at Yale "looks like a belated, but still powerful, act of conscience." But when we think of really powerful acts of conscience in this century, especially in connection with World War II, this claim for de Man's ethical sensibility by Hartman—who oversees much of Yale's work on the Holocaust—seems exceedingly odd.

Lehman's discerning analysis of this matter suggests another reason. De Man did not in fact keep silent: he lied in representing himself as a student in Paris, a translator in England, or a member of the French resistance. And why he lied is not hard to deduce. There is a passage in Nietzsche, quoted by de Man in *Blindness and Insight*, to the effect that "We try to give ourselves a new past from which we should have liked to descend instead of the past from which we actually descended." De Man created for himself at Yale a fictional past because he wanted to escape from the moral and professional opprobrium to which he would have been subjected if his friends and employers, many of whom were Jewish, had known of his past. It is difficult to disagree with Lehman's astute conclusion on this matter:

> De Man's silence about his past seems to be, above everything else, expedient and self-protective, the characteristic behavior of a man who would sooner jettison a family and a his-

3 See "Professor Hartman Reconstructs Paul de Man," by Roger Kimball; *The New Criterion*, May 1988, pages 36-43.

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> tory than forfeit his second chance at success; for his American years presented de Man with the chance to succeed precisely in establishing for himself the Olympian voice of authority to which he had already aspired in his wartime journalism.

But the second question that evolved out of these revelations—whether there is a connection between de Man's wartime history and his later theory of language and meaning—is more interesting to theoretical criticism. The enemies of deconstructionism immediately asserted a direct link. Deconstructionism was a theory of reading devised in advance to absolve de Man of the eventual charge against him that he was a Nazi collaborator. What could be more ingenious than inventing a critical system asserting the irrelevance of biography and history, a system arguing that the text is a tissue of contradictory rhetorical elements, a theory proposing that the text always undermines itself? Given his theory, even a text like "The Jews in Contemporary Literature" could be deconstructed as an allegory of its own "unreadability."

To resist these accusations, Paul de Man's friends and disciples—Derrida, Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson, Geoffrey Hartman, Jonathan Culler, Andrzej Warminski, and others—mobilized for what Lehman calls a "guerrilla war" against the detractors of de Man and deconstructionism. The reputation of de Man could be saved and the status of deconstructionism could be "recuperated" by applying his own methods in order to show that these articles "subverted their own spoken intentions."

In a remarkable act of absolution, the de Man admirer Shoshana Felman explained that "History as Holocaust is mutely omnipresent in the theoretical endeavor of de Man's mature work." But if de Man was mute about the Holocaust, how can it be claimed to be omnipresent in his work? Only by insisting that an absence is a presence. But Felman appears to go further: if the meaning of the sign, to a deconstructionist, is always ambiguous, the absence of the sign would appear to be crystal clear. De Man's silence, she goes on, should be read "not (as some would have it) as a cover-up or a dissimulation of the past, but as an ongoing active *transformation of the very act of bearing witness.*" But how could someone mute about his Fascist past bear witness to it? What we have in de Man is not a transformation of the act of bearing witness but the antithesis of the act.

Of course it was left to Jacques Derrida, the Founder of Deconstructionism, to prove that his disciple de Man was not the Fascist anti-Semite suggested by these *Le Soir* and *Het Vlaamsche Land* articles. Derrida's first line of attack was to claim that "The concept of making a charge itself belongs to the structure of phallogocentrism." And thereupon he accused de Man's accusers of Nazi-like behavior:

> To judge, to condemn the work or the man on the basis of what was a brief episode, to call for closing, that is to say, at least figuratively, for censuring or burning his books is to reproduce the exterminating gesture which one accuses de Man of not having armed himself against sooner with the necessary vigilance.

But of course no one even figuratively proposed the burning of de Man's books, although their relation to his politics and the cult of hero worship he inspired in his disciples seemed worth pursuing. What de Man's detractors were undertaking to do, as Lehman so persuasively documents, was to bring the experience of Paul de Man and his critical theories under ethical and critical judgment.

In an article in *Critical Inquiry* for Spring 1988—"Like the Sound of the Sea Deep within a Shell: Paul de Man's War"—Derrida stipulated the existence (and even the manifest content) of de Man's articles. But he insisted—as his critical method required him to do—that "de Man's discourse is constantly split, disjointed, engaged in incessant conflicts." He claimed that "all the propositions [in the articles] carry with themselves a counterproposition"—one favorable to democracy! The essay is garrulous and rambling,

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itself constantly split and disjointed, as it seesaws back and forth, logic-chopping furiously, battling in de Man's defense and in defense of the critical theory that had made Derrida such a sought-after figure on the American academic lecture circuit. Much of the essay can be dismissed as a gross form of special pleading. But at the very least Derrida shows that de Man did at times work both sides of the political street, buttering up the Nazis while hedging his bets in case the democracies won the war. Yet there can be no doubt that de Man allowed himself to be a tool of the Nazi propaganda machine. David Lehman's comment on Derrida's absolution of his disciple is striking: "Borrowing Derrida's logic, one could deconstruct *Mein Kampf* to reveal that its author was conflicted on the subject of the Jews."

Reading the criticism of Paul de Man now, with the hindsight knowledge of his wartime collaborationism, produces curious effects. For example, Lehman highlights a passage that others too have found disturbing. In *Allegories of Reading*, de Man observes, apropos of Rousseau's *Confessions*, that

> It is always possible to face up to any experience (to excuse any guilt), because the experience always exists simultaneously as fictional discourse and as empirical event and it is never possible to decide which one of the two possibilities is the right one. The indecision makes it possible to excuse the bleakest of crimes because, as a fiction, it escapes from the constraints of guilt and innocence.

Back in 1980, before the scandal broke, Denis Donoghue observed of this passage that to allow oneself to remain suspended between the event and its fictional discourse would, if rigorously held to, lead to the dismissal of all the "questions commonly considered in morality, ethics, politics, and psychology, and treat them as purely linguistic functions." This dismissal was indeed theoretically possible. But after the revelations, it appears actually to have happened in de Man's experience. De Man seems to have sidestepped any question of guilt whatsoever by consistently transforming his past actions into a linguistic fiction. In this sense, he did indeed, in the language of Nietzsche, give himself "a new past" from which he should have liked to descend instead of the past from which he actually descended.

In any case, the revelations of de Man's Nazi collaboration—and his disciples' claim that we misunderstand the clear import of *what only seems to be* his Fascist anti-Semitic language—rightly lead David Lehman to the conclusion that "deconstruction is not a value-free science but a program that promotes a reckless disregard for the truth and a propensity for hero-worship." This is, for Lehman, "the final paradox of deconstruction: it *is* the crisis that it pretends to expose." In this observation he is supremely right.

Notes from the surface

Bret Easton Ellis American Psycho. Vintage, 399 pages, $11 paper

reviewed by Bruce Bawer

Bret Easton Ellis's third novel, *American Psycho*, became the center of pre-publication controversy last fall when articles in both *Time* and *Spy* offered accounts of the protagonist's atrocious acts of sexual violence and Simon & Schuster dropped plans for publication. Some commentators charged Ellis with misogyny; others asserted his First Amendment rights (as if the First Amendment granted authors the right to contracts with major New York houses). The novel, which was picked up posthaste by Random House, has now been published as the latest entry in its "Vintage Contemporaries" series. This is not, of course, Ellis's first book to have drawn attention far out of proportion to its merits. His debut novel, *Less Than Zero* (1985), established the then Bennington undergraduate as the hottest of hot young novelists. Short and fast and glitzy as a music video, *Less Than Zero*'s plotless, present-tense yarn about one Clay, a rich L.A. col-

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legian home for the Christmas holidays, was tailor-made for the MTV generation. Clay (who also narrates) spends his waking hours with his vacuous high-school friends, holding trivial conversations, listening to rock music, doing drugs, and having indiscriminate sex. We see less of their inner lives than of their expensive cars and clothes; as in a "Peanuts" comic strip, the parents are invariably absent. In the novel's most infamous episode, Clay's pals tie a twelve-year-old girl to a bed and rape her; his refusal to participate is meant to mark him as the sensitive one.

Less Than Zero is glib, thin, shallow. If it was taken seriously by some reviewers, it was because Ellis, in showing how empty life can be for empty people—however young and rich and beautiful they may be, and however free, peaceful, and prosperous their society—was seen as making a Powerful Statement about the spiritual hollowness of contemporary American life. One might have protested that it wasn't life, American or contemporary or otherwise, that was spiritually hollow, it was Mr. Ellis's novel. Certainly he had loaded the dice in a big way, populating the book with the most insipid of adolescents and concentrating only on the surfaces of their lives. Though we were told that *Less Than Zero* constituted not a celebration of these kids but a criticism of them, one couldn't help noticing that the readers who ate it up tended to be blank, trend-happy twentysomethings who might have been those very kids, five or ten years older and not much wiser. Nor could one help noticing that Ellis's own life strongly resembled those of the characters he supposedly criticized. Moving from L.A. to New York, he became a fixture of the faddish downtown scene, attending parties for the likes of Robin Leach and becoming a familiar name to gossip-column readers; a *Los Angeles Times* reporter noted in 1987 that his "life style is so upscale that it more closely resembles a junior stockbroker's than a writer's." A reader could be excused for seeing a touch of hypocrisy in Ellis's claim that he was in the business of serious social criticism.

Two years after Ellis's first novel came *The Rules of Attraction*, whose extreme similarity to its predecessor (one critic dubbed it *Less Than Zero Goes to College*) suggested that Ellis had emptied his tiny bag of tricks and that his fifteen minutes of fame were over. Then came the controversy over *American Psycho*, which gave his career a new lease on life. The secret of its notoriety is simple: it's not just more of the same, it's a *lot* more of the same, taking us in the same general direction as *Less Than Zero* but going much further. In 399 utterly plotless pages, Ellis narrates, in the usual present-tense, first-person, nuance-free Brat Pack prose, nearly two years' worth of selected episodes from the mostly unexceptional Manhattan-yuppie social life of its narrator-antihero, an affluent, twenty-six-year-old junior stockbroker and Harvard grad named Patrick Bateman. As in *Less Than Zero*, our hero's friends are all vain, vapid, and super-privileged (one of them, in apparent homage to the movie version of *Bright Lights, Big City*, is named Jamie Conway), and they all dress very well, patronize the same eateries and night spots and clothing emporia, and hold the same banal conversations; once again, moreover, Ellis's emphasis is not on the inner lives but on the household furnishings, overpriced meals, and above all the designer duds, which he catalogues exhaustively: "He's wearing a linen suit by Canali Milano, a cotton shirt by Ike Behar, a silk tie by Bill Blass and cap-toed leather lace-ups from Brooks Brothers. I'm wearing a lightweight linen suit with pleated trousers, a cotton shirt, a dotted silk tie, all by Valentino Couture, and perforated cap-toe leather shoes by Allen-Edmonds."

And so on for hundreds of pages, during which one has trouble believing that Bateman would be (a) so obsessive about clothing and (b) so good at naming designers and stores. Of course, Bateman's finery fixation is deliberate on Ellis's part. But why? Satire? Of what? Granted, many New Yorkers are designer snobs; but Bateman is too far out to be believed, and designer snobbery does not seem nearly momentous enough a phenomenon to merit such attention. Ellis's preoccu-

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pation with it would appear to suggest that he is himself something of a designer snob. So little, in any event, do we see of the young men and women inside all that costly fabric that their names are practically interchangeable. That Bateman is continually mistaken for fellow members of the fast-track crowd makes it clear that this interchangeability, too, is deliberate on Ellis's part; yet it makes it impossible to believe in or care about anyone.

To be sure, there are a few attributes that set Bateman apart. For one thing, he's so handsome and hunky—a "gorgeous stud," "*total GQ*"—that friends of both sexes fall for him; just as people in *Less Than Zero* keep telling Clay that he looks like David Bowie, so strangers keep asking Bateman if he's a model. For another thing, Bateman's women friends see him as sensitive (though this doesn't come across to the reader). Oh, and there's something else that sets Bateman apart: every so often, he commits acts of rape, torture, murder, mutilation, dismemberment, and cannibalism, mostly on attractive young women whom he has lured up to his stylish Upper East Side apartment. He describes these acts graphically and dispassionately, often juxtaposing them, for enhanced effect, with routine daily activities. ("In the kitchen I try to make meat loaf out of the girl but it becomes too frustrating. . . . I rest by watching a tape of last week's new CBS sitcom, *Murphy Brown*.") Ellis would have us believe that his descriptions of these outrages have a profound thematic purpose; so would the folks at Vintage, who have placed the following copy on the book's back cover:

> AMERICAN PSYCHO is set in a world (Manhattan) and an era (the Eighties) recognizably our own. The wealthy elite grows infinitely wealthier, the poor and disturbed are turned out onto the streets by the tens of thousands, and anything, including the very worst, seems possible. Even so, Bateman, who expresses his true self by torture and murder, prefigures an apocalyptic horror that no society could bear to confront. And he remains, in the end, at large. This is not an exit.

The message: this novel is *serious*. It is *socially relevant*. It has a *moral design*: if Ellis has chosen to write about a psychopath, it is because he reflects our society—attractive and affluent on the outside and monstrous inside. (Ellis implicitly compares Bateman, on this score, to President Reagan—who, according to one character, looks "normal" and "*un*dangerous" but is in fact very dangerous.) Presumably to underscore Bateman's supposed representativeness, Ellis quotes *Notes from Underground* in an epigraph: "such persons as the composer of these *Notes* not only exist in our society, but indeed must exist, considering the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed. . . . He represents a generation that is still living out its days among us." Ellis's placement of this extract at the head of his book is the height of audacity—not only because of the implicit comparison between himself and Dostoevsky, but because Bateman represents nothing: zip, zilch, zero. He is merely an Eighties cliché—the heartless, hedonistic Wall Street yuppie—to which Ellis has added a private life out of a slasher movie. He's perfectly one-dimensional, and Ellis's principal way of deflecting criticism of this one-dimensionality is to have him, toward the novel's end, expatiate unconvincingly upon it: "[T]here is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me. . . . *I simply am not there*. . . . My personality is sketchy and unformed, my heartlessness goes deep and is persistent." Only in a handful of such eleventh-hour introspective passages (which are patently designed to fill in the psychology missing from the book's first three hundred pages) does Ellis attempt to probe beneath our hero's surface. After grinding one victim into meat patties, for instance, Bateman describes himself as

> unable to find solace in any of this, crying out, sobbing "I just want to be loved," cursing the earth and everything I have been taught: prin-

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> ciples, distinctions, choices, morals, compromises, knowledge, unity, prayer—all of it was wrong, without any final purpose. All it came down to was: die or adapt. I imagine my own vacant face, the disembodied voice coming from its mouth: *These are terrible times.*

Patently, the idea here is that Bateman's destructiveness has its origins in the world beyond himself, that he kills and cannibalizes because this is the only way for him to "adapt" to a world devoid of moral dimension or metaphysical meaning. Yet one doesn't buy it for a minute—not because Bateman is too awful to be believed, but because Ellis has such a puerile comprehension of the nature of evil and of the human soul. Fixated on the idea that modern life is utterly meaningless—the only idea, by the way, that seems ever to have captured his imagination—he shrinks at every turn from the portrayal of purposeful activity: if *Less Than Zero* takes place during Christmas vacation, it is plainly because Ellis doesn't want to show these kids doing schoolwork (nor does he provide even a glimpse of their parents working for the money that makes their self-indulgence possible); likewise, in *American Psycho*, he never shows Bateman or anyone else earning their six-figure salaries. In neither book does anyone go near a library, a concert, a ballet, a museum, a church; nobody does volunteer work; nobody visits a friend in a hospital. Anyone who has seen rich L.A. teenagers and Wall Street yuppies at play knows that many of them are spoiled and superficial; but one also knows how large these cities are, how many people in them lead purposeful lives, and how insignificant, in the larger scheme of things, are the trifling concerns of the sort of people over whom Ellis obsesses. Ellis is twenty-six, but his baby nihilism makes him sound more like fourteen:

> [I]t did not occur to me, *ever*, that people were good or that man was capable of change or that the world could be a better place through one's taking pleasure in a feeling or a look or a gesture, of receiving another person's love or kindness. Nothing was affirmative. . . . Justice is dead. Fear, recrimination, innocence, sympathy, guilt, waste, failure, grief, were things, emotions, that no one really felt anymore. Reflection is useless, the world is senseless. Evil is its only permanence. God is not alive. Love cannot be trusted. Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in . . .

Next to this, Dostoevsky sounds as upbeat as Norman Vincent Peale. One comes away from such passages with the frightening impression that, in Ellis's mind, Bateman is a monster because he's so *sensitive*—the point being that in a corrupt world it's not the corrupt souls but those in search of meaning and spiritual sustenance who are driven to commit inconceivable acts of brutality. "Is evil something you are?" Bateman asks. "Or is it something you do?" So maybe Bateman's not evil, but just, well, a Holden Caulfield gone berserk in the pressure cooker of Harvard and Wall Street in the Eighties. Several times, he more or less admits what he's been up to—he tells a buddy that "I like to dissect girls" and mentions to his girlfriend his "*need* to engage in . . . homicidal behavior on a massive scale"—but, accustomed to violent chitchat, they think he's joking; either that or, locked in their own worlds, they don't really hear him. As he says to an exsteady before nailing her to a board and cutting out her tongue: "Does anyone really *see* anyone else? Did *you* ever see *me*? *See*? What does that mean? Ha! *See*? Ha! I just don't get it. Ha!"

At one juncture, Ellis quotes a Madonna lyric: "*life is a mystery, everyone must stand alone.*" His apparent point: that the key distinction between Bateman and the rest of us is not that he's more brutal, but that he's more devastated by the aloneness we all share; evidently Ellis wants to shock us with the recognition that we're more like this maniac than we'd care to admit. Yet when one looks at Bateman all one can see is Ellis, Ellis, Ellis: from start to finish, the novel reads like a highly depraved wish-fulfillment fantasy at the center of which, as in *Less Than Zero*, one feels that Ellis has placed someone

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who, with his "*total GQ*" looks and such, is very much the sort of gent he'd like to be. As for Bateman's crimes, one struggles to believe that Ellis has discovered these iniquities in a universal realm, a realm larger than himself, instead of having reached into some private, grotesquely twisted part of his own being; but he doesn't convince one for a moment that this is so. Bateman's story is not visionary but voyeuristic, disturbing one not in a literary but in a lurid way, knocking one for a loop, like a *Halloween* or *Friday the 13th* movie, instead of hitting one where one lives, like Dante or Kafka or *Heart of Darkness* (or, for that matter, Dostoevsky); rather than hold a mirror up to one's soul, Ellis gives one a window on offenses that are as deficient in symbolic resonance as they are abundant in awfulness. After reading the book, one cannot help finding a certain appropriateness in the fact that the title and the author's name are run together on the cover with no space break or change in the typeface: AMERICAN PSYCHO BRET EASTON ELLIS. We do live in decadent times, but this novel is not an imaginative commentary on that decadence; it is a profane and witless contribution to it.

The Merton fieldmouse

Barry Webb Edmund Blunden: A Biography. Yale University Press, 360 pages, $35

reviewed by Jeffrey Meyers

Born in London, the first of nine children of an eccentric schoolmaster, Edmund Blunden (1896-1974) grew up in a village in Kent. He spent most of his life in the countryside, indulging his passion for fishing, cricket, and church music, and feeding bacon to the rats he felt were related to his verminous comrades in the trenches of the Great War. Short, sensitive, and shy, he was a charming and generous birdlike man who enjoyed a wide circle of friends and many devoted pupils in England and the Orient.

Blunden suffered four tragic blows. Two years on the firing-line (longer than any other war writer) remained a lifelong nightmare and at times transformed his beloved nature into a Poe-like threat:

> Oaks, once my friends, with ugly murmurings
> Madden me, and ivy whirs like condor wings:
> The very bat that stoops and whips askance
> Shrills malice at the soul grown strange in
> France.

The cruel death from contaminated milk of his first child, aged five weeks, left a permanent scar and led him to father six more children in an attempt to replace her. His first marriage, to Mary Daines, the simple daughter of a village blacksmith, broke up in 1927 when he returned from three years in Japan to discover she was in love with a younger man. And his second marriage, to the intellectual Sylva Norman, who disliked sex and refused to have children, finally collapsed, after eleven years and many separations, in 1944. Yet as a friend perceptively observed, "something about the little man made every woman who met him want to protect him from everyone else—and in the end they almost smothered him to death with rivalries of affection."

Blunden, who wrote "I love to see those loving and beloved / Whom Nature seems to have spited," was particularly attracted to writers (like Charles Lamb and Ivor Gurney) who had suffered mental illness, and he could have said, with Theodore Roethke:

> But that's all right,—
> If they let you eat and swear
> With the likes of Blake,
> And Christopher Smart,
> And that sweet man, John Clare.

Blunden also had a great deal in common with his younger contemporary Geoffrey Grigson, who called him "the Merton fieldmouse." Both went to Oxford and were prolific men of letters: literary journalists, critics, anthologists, editors, travel writers, autobiographers, and traditional poets; both

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had a well-informed love of nature and shared a taste for neglected writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Like Blunden, Grigson was (I can attest) a kind man—despite his fierce reputation.

Blunden's distinguished predecessors at Christ's Hospital school in Sussex—Coleridge, Lamb, and Leigh Hunt—strongly influenced his literary tastes and career. He was passionately attached to the school, considered it a symbol of sophisticated culture, and faithfully attended the Old Boy dinners. He went straight from school to war at the age of eighteen and, as an asthmatic, was mortally susceptible to gas attacks. During his first night under whizzing crossfire, the young subaltern, having volunteered for a stretcher-party, barely survived "the death dance of flares and rockets." He compared the battle of the Somme to the retreat from Moscow, and won the Military Cross after a dangerous reconnaissance brought him right up against the German line. In his best-known book, *Undertones of War* (1928), he morbidly recalled "the gobbets of blackening flesh, the earth-wall sotted with blood, with flesh, the eye under the duckboard, the pulpy bone." But he also saw the nightingale incongruously singing on the barbed wire and shot at by Fritz. Orwell, who later broadcast to India with Blunden, maintained that "nobody else who wrote about the war of 1914 to 1918 remained so aware of the procession of the seasons and the birds and wild-flowers which somehow managed to survive even on the edges of the battle-field."

After the war Blunden won a scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford, but left without taking a degree. This never hurt his academic career. During this period—in London, Boar's Hill, and Garsington—Blunden quickly developed a bright succession of literary friendships with Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Bridges, John Masefield, Robert Graves, Middleton Murry, Walter de la Mare, and Thomas Hardy. Like many survivors annealed by the Great War—T. E. Lawrence as well as Graves and Sassoon—Blunden was deeply drawn to the wise and aged Hardy, who himself had written some of the finest war poetry. Blunden was also impressed by Hardy's ability to urinate "on the march" without breaking his pace—the sign of a "real countryman." These important literary contacts led to exhausting jobs on *The Athenaeum*, *The Nation*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*, and to 3,400 articles and reviews. When writing his lives of Shelley and Leigh Hunt, and preparing his editions of John Clare and Wilfred Owen, he fluently followed his own advice to "dip your pen and say what you have to say."

Following in the rural tradition of Wordsworth and of Hardy, Blunden's pleasant, readable, old-fashioned poetry unrolled in mellifluous numbers. His dominant characteristics, writes Barry Webb, are "a careful control of form, detailed description, close observation, love of dialect, a consciously literary tone and an eye cast backwards to traditional structures and themes rather than any modern experimentation." (He had no taste for or appreciation of the avant-garde poetry of Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and Auden.) Blunden's poems often lack fire and seem quite tame when compared to the savage insights of Wilfred Owen. But the last stanza of "Third Ypres," which describes the haunting effect of the dead upon the living, has some of his best lines:

> Still swept the rain, roared guns,
> Still swooped into the swamps of flesh and
> blood,
> All to the drabness of uncreation sunk,
> And all thought dwindled to a moan, Relieve!
> But who with what command can now relieve
> The dead men from that chaos, or my soul?

In 1924, his reputation well established, Blunden accepted a three-year contract as Professor of English at Tokyo University. He learned very little Japanese, was isolated and unhappy at first, and found the students either sycophantic or secretive. In Tokyo he met an unattractive and possessive Japanese Christian lady, Aki Hayashi, who was fluent in English and loved Romantic poetry. She became his mistress; after his passion had

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cooled, he brought her back to England, employed her as research assistant (scouring obscure periodicals for references to minor writers), and supported the mild succubus for thirty-four years.

In 1929, when Robert Graves published *Good-bye to All That*, perhaps the best book about the Great War, Blunden (Webb writes) shared Sassoon's rage about its inaccuracies and its negative portrayal of the common soldier. Graves's biographer Martin Seymour-Smith gives a much more incisive account than Webb, noting that Sassoon was also upset by Graves's remark about Sassoon's mother attempting to communicate with her dead son and was furious that Graves had included, without his permission, a rejected unpublished poem. Blunden, envious of Graves's masterpiece, urged Sassoon to threaten Jonathan Cape with legal proceedings and force him to delete the offensive passages. Webb regrets that Sassoon's copy of this book, with over three hundred corrections and hostile comments in the margin, "never found its way into the British Museum." I catalogued this book for Christie's sale of Sassoon's library on June 4, 1975, and included Sassoon's grateful comment on how Graves had saved him from the possibility of a firing squad after he had refused to continue fighting in the war: "R. G. could have done nothing to prevent me being court-martialled if I'd gone on refusing to accept a Medical Board. He persuaded me to do this . . . by swearing on the Bible that whatever I did they would only shut me up in an asylum. This well meaning lie undoubtedly saved me from a lot of trouble." Sassoon's copy was bought by the House of El Dieff in New York and offered for $15,000 in 1976 as "surely the outstanding memorabilia of World War I."

Blunden became in 1931 a fellow and tutor in English at Merton College, Oxford, where he remained for the next thirteen years. There he met the attractive student Claire Poynting, twenty-two years younger than Blunden, who became his third wife in 1945 and brought him great happiness. More naïve than malign, Blunden made some extremely foolish political statements during the prewar years at Merton. Motivated by a blind desire to avoid the inevitable European conflict, he supported Franco during the Spanish Civil War, was pro-German and anti-Semitic (despite his lifelong friendship with the bountifully generous Sassoon), sympathized with the British Nazi Oswald Mosley, and defended Hitler as "marvellously honest and humane."

Despite this idiocy, Blunden became a successful cultural advisor at the British Embassy in Tokyo during 1947-50 and gave six hundred lectures throughout the country. A colleague later recalled him lecturing "without notes, with strange, inhuman bird-bright eyes, fitting his lecture together, straw by straw, twig by twig, like a bird's nest."

From 1953 to 1964 Blunden was Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong, where he disliked the climate as much as the academic politics and was even unhappier than in his first year at Tokyo. At the end of his stay he described himself as a disappointed man who had committed academic suicide by accepting the stagnant chair at Hong Kong. An interesting and valuable book could be written about the numerous English authors, like Blunden, who were fascinated by an alien culture and who lived, taught, traveled in, and wrote about China and Japan: Auden and Isherwood, William Empson, I. A. Richards, Harold Acton, Ralph Hodgson, Osbert Sitwell, Julian Bell, Peter Quennell, William Plomer, Francis King, D. J. Enright, G. S. Fraser, George Barker, and James Kirkup. One would have liked more discussion of Blunden in this cultural context.

In 1966 Blunden, energetically managed by the formidable don Enid Starkie (who could not quote a single one of his lines) and supported by Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor (not otherwise known for her literary interests), defeated Robert Lowell by 477 to 241 votes and was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford. But his intense nervousness and fear of public failure nearly brought on a collapse. He once mislaid his notes inside his mortarboard, which he placed on his head

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while he fumbled to find the papers. "By a cruel stroke of fate," Webb remarks, "he had been given his most public English platform at the moment when he had least to say."

After Sassoon's death in 1967, "a new calm seemed to enter Edmund's consciousness. It was as if the spectre of his own death could now be faced without fear." Age and illness had swelled his avian face to an owlish rotundity and the increased desire for drink made his Lear-like rages more violent. In 1974 he died of a heart attack and was buried in his Suffolk village churchyard.

Barry Webb, who knew Blunden in old age, has produced a lively, accurate, sympathetic, and well-written life, with a few flaws that prevent it from being a first-rate biography. Webb's massive sequence of sometimes commonplace quotations are not fully discussed or well integrated into the narrative. Too impressed—or overwhelmed—by the sheer quantity of Blunden's work ("one week in September saw the publication of two book reviews, a poem and an article"), Webb does not provide sufficient evaluation, for example, of the writings about Japan. And Webb is too eager to account for the day-to-day activities of Blunden's busy life, less interested in thoroughly analyzing the major events (Blunden's relations with his two oldest children after a three-year absence in Japan, the complex reasons for the collapse of his second marriage, the substance of his long conversation with Chou En-lai in December 1955) and in interpreting the larger patterns of his life (compulsion to work, fear of insanity, need to drink). It is unfortunate that this expensive book, atrociously typeset in India, has many cracked, blurred, and blotted letters, and numerous black threads defacing the all-too-faint pages. Yet the virtues of this book far outweigh the defects and Webb, like his subject, deserves the commendation that Melville mentioned in his dedication to *Israel Potter* (1855): "Biography, in its purer form, confined to the ended lives of the true and brave, may be held the fairest meed of human virtue—one given and received in entire disinterestedness—since neither can the biographer hope for acknowledgment from the subject, nor the subject at all avail himself of the biographical distinction conferred."

France between the lines

Eugen Weber My France: Politics, Culture, Myth. Belknap/Harvard University Press, 412 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Mark Falcoff

My France is a valedictory volume of essays by Eugen Weber, one of the five or six greatest European scholars in the United States and one of the two or three finest historians of France now writing anywhere. Born in Romania, where French culture was a grail ardently sought by anyone with pretensions to learning or even refinement, Weber had the good fortune to leave his unhappy country just before World War II and settle in Great Britain. After a brief but outstanding academic career as a student and graduate fellow at Cambridge University, he emigrated to the United States in the 1950s. For nearly four decades he has been on the faculty at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he has produced groundbreaking studies on French politics, culture, and society. Perhaps the best known are *Peasants into Frenchmen* and *Action Française*, although my favorite is a collaborative volume (edited with Hans Rogger), *The European Right.*

Weber is a type of academic soon to become extinct on the American scene: a man of profound, indeed astonishing, culture, who also possesses great humor and a sense of nuance. Those of us who attended college before the 1960s were lucky enough to meet up with men like him during our undergraduate days; their most lasting gift to us was the discovery that in addition to high purpose, learning could actually be fun. They also gave us something of a historical imagination. As Weber continually reminds us here, while all history is "contemporary history," it

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is also true that the the past is not the present. The world looked different to people two hundred (or two thousand) years ago; the job of the historian is to reconstruct that world-view without condescension or ridicule. If you imagine that this is an easy or commonplace task, I invite you to peruse the advertisements for the latest university press monographs in any historical journal.

Here, then, we have fifteen elegant, witty, astonishingly learned essays on a variety of French topics, many of which would not immediately occur to us in the first place. "Who Sang the 'Marseillaise'?" asks the title of one chapter. The answer is just about everyone. But the surprising news is that for most Frenchmen in 1792, when the song was adopted as the national hymn, French was a foreign language. Indeed, France in the early nineteenth century was like Poland in the twentieth—French was the language of the upper classes; peasants used it to speak to their betters. And here is an even better index: in Christmas tableaux in churches, the shepherds spoke in dialect, while the angels spoke in French! It was only after the spread of obligatory public education, the establishment of railroads, and, above all, universal conscription that there existed mechanisms to unite the country around a single tongue.

Likewise, in a study of French maps, Weber reveals that before the late nineteenth century nobody thought there was much need to establish the geographical extension of the country; indeed, the famous *Encyclopédie* (1751) did not contain a single map. This is not to be wondered at, he writes, since the culture of nineteenth-century France was above all an oral culture. "The technical possibilities of print and publishing maintained the costliness, hence the rarity, of images of all sorts. In the quest for national symbols, the flag was more convenient, easier to see, to read, to assimilate." It was only after the loss of Alsace and Lorraine in 1870 that French politicians and educators became concerned with the country's exact configuration, and even then cartography became an exercise in consolation: The maps hung in French schools compensated for the loss of the two historic provinces by showing the vast extension of the newly acquired Overseas Empire. (For the same reason, it now occurs to me, Chilean maps always include the country's uninhabited, frozen Antarctic territories as a way of assuaging a sense of geographical smallness and insignificance.)

In "What is Real in Folk Tales?" Weber engages in an astonishing *explication de texte.* Apparently the major theme of the stories in question is the search for food and warmth, two things we take so much for granted today. And "unlike our world, which excuses everything and understands nothing, [the] world [of folk tales] always exacts its retribution." In a less complex society, acts and their consequences were not cushioned, as they are today, by eloquent "sociological" justifications.

In a series of essays on French politics, Weber carries to a new level of sophistication the work begun in his earlier books. One of his major themes, developed in various places, is the need to rethink our concepts of left and right, nationalism and anti-Semitism. He also reminds us that ideas that are patently wrong are just as important to study as those that are right. "[I]f persistence is any criterion, then some ideas must have their positive significance, too, if only because they keep cropping up over and over again." Without saying so directly, he suggests strongly that even traditional or "conservative" historians have been excessively influenced by Marxist approaches, most of which are utterly off the mark. In his studies of peasant political behavior in the late nineteenth century, for example, he insists that voting left "does not, per se, prove politicization. It can just as easily reflect the social cohesion and traditional views rooted in the past." While Boulangism may have looked like a latter-day Bonapartism to those living in Paris, to those in the countryside it had (astonishingly!) an almost eschatological quality.

Weber rejects the hoary notion that French nationalism was a political tendency hatched out of fear of the working class. Far

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from it: The French proletariat as a political force of its own was present virtually *in ovo*, which allowed some nationalists like Charles Péguy and Maurice Barrès the luxury of styling themselves "socialists" of some sort. For these men the real enemy was the lower middle class. As one character in Barrès's novel *Les Déracinés* remarks, "Have you calculated how many graduates, each one remarkable and full of appetites, come to Paris every day? There's your danger: the overproduction of merit." By way of contrast, Weber reminds us that in the nineteenth century, "the historic left was against what we used to call progress, that is, the development of capital and industry."

His most piquant observations are saved for the final chapter, "Revolution? Counterrevolution? What Revolution?"

> Revolution, which had been about political power for people who were far from poor, was said to be about the poor, about the poor ceasing to be poor and, even though its efficacy as a means to this end remained dubious, the myth took shape. The poor as energizing agents of real revolution turned into the poor as dynamizing ideal of prospective revolution. They had been other ranks in the armies of the revolution; now they became its flag.

Of course, he adds, "superior revolutionary capacity of a movement has little to do with its popular character or representativeness." Indeed, quite the contrary. Since 1902 Leninism has held that the working class is unable to develop an adequate revolutionary consciousness on its own, and must be led by the nose by an elite of professional agitators. "So the people, the poor people . . . could continue to enjoy its heroic role, but (a big but) only the role that had been written for it." None of which, he hastens to say, discounts the possibility that at given times and places the people "welcomed the chance to be insolent in its turn, to see its 'betters' cut down to size, not excluding its revolutionary emancipators, carted through hooting streets that had cheered them days before." We have seen demonstrations of this very thing in both St. Petersburg and Managua, and we are bound to see it again.

These are, one should forewarn potential readers, among the more vivid and quotable observations in a narrative which is dense and at times even difficult. *My France* is a book that forces us occasionally to stand on our intellectual tiptoes—turning to the extensive notes in the back, or stopping a moment to reflect on a point too complex or too subtle to grasp all at once. A worthy disciple of Marc Bloch, Weber is quietly insistent upon rigor, scholarly integrity, and moral imagination in historiography. "I do not believe that, in the popular phrase, to understand all is to forgive all. Indeed, it is one of the weaknesses of contemporary thinking," he concludes, "to act as if one could understand all, and as if one could or should forgive all. We cannot explain everything, and we understand even less." This book gives us a chance to work through some extraordinarily important intellectual problems alongside one of the last great masters of the historian's art.

At a tangent

Seamus Heaney Selected Poems, 1966-1987. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 273 pages, $20

reviewed by Robert Richman

Seamus Heaney's *Selected Poems, 1966-1987* is the second such compilation that the fifty-one-year-old Irish poet has published in the United States. Although the first, *Poems, 1965-1975* (1980), claimed to be a complete gathering of the poems from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), and *North* (1975)—Heaney's first four books—this was not the case. Omitted were seven poems from *Death of a Naturalist*. This new volume, an acknowledged "selected," excludes, in addition to the already-banished poems, the bulk of the early, Ted Hughes-inspired work from Heaney's first two books. Gone

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too is a small group of political poems from the late Sixties that appeared in *North*. What remains is the decidedly apolitical, un-Ted Hughesian work of the last fifteen years, principally from *Stations* (1975), *Field Work* (1979), *Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish* (1983), *Station Island* (1984), and *The Haw Lantern* (1987).

Heaney has a larger following in the United States than any Irish poet since Yeats. Given the suspicion in this country of foreign poets, this is no small feat. What makes Heaney's acceptance here even more remarkable is that he doesn't conform to the archetype of the exportable "bard," what Louise Bogan once referred to as "the coat-trailing, charming, Irish semi-clown," who sentimentalizes the Irish peasants. On the contrary, Heaney is a rootless modernist whose main goal as a poet is to express the plight of the contemporary, alienated sensibility.

The alienation that is expressed in Heaney's poems—and it comes through despite their reliance on local Irish detail—may help to explain, at least in part, the poet's success in the United States. Heaney's dislocation from his culture would appear to strike a chord in Americans of sensitivity and feeling who are themselves detached from the mainsprings of their culture.

This estrangement is what the Irish poet John Montague had in mind when he referred to the Irish writer as a "natural cosmopolitan." Two events especially in recent Irish history proved to be decisive in fostering the emergence of these "natural"—and, like Heaney, wandering—"cosmopolitans." The first event was the death of the Gaelic tongue. This had the effect of cutting off writers from their literary heritage. The second event was the creation, in 1922, of the Irish Free State. This exacerbated the Irish writer's longstanding tendency to extol the nation. These events encouraged the isolation of serious, independent writers such as Heaney. No wonder, then, that he has, like some of the American modernists, sought out an international, and not just national, readership.

But the modernist figure to whom Heaney owes his principal allegiance is his fellow Irishman James Joyce. Joyce, of course, was an enemy of Ireland's religious, social, and political institutions; yet both *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* are deeply imbued with the physical presence of Dublin.

Heaney's poetry also owes something to his other Irish precursor, W. B. Yeats. Beneath the mask of the aristocratic Anglo-Irish Protestant, with his "high-stepping tread" and "equestrian profile"—Heaney's words, from an admiring 1978 lecture on Yeats reprinted in his prose collection *Preoccupations* (1980)—was a man who believed that poetry couldn't live without the details of everyday life. Heaney, it seems, has found in Yeats's work a model, as well.

Heaney's first book, *Death of a Naturalist*, appears, at any rate, to consist of nature poems that have been inspired by the poet's native County Derry. After a bit of scrutiny, however, it becomes apparent that these nature poems have been inspired by the English poet Ted Hughes, whose shadow Heaney was then laboring under. Hughes's "natural world," of course, is brimming with an unnatural amount of violence and savagery; Heaney's early poems have this bias. In "Cow in Calf," for example, Heaney writes, "I had to / hit [the cow] again and again and / heard the blows plump like a depth charge / far in her gut." This poem has been omitted from the *Selected Poems, 1966-1987*, as has "For the Commander of the 'Eliza,'" in which Heaney writes that those on board "[w]ho could not swim might go ahead and sink."

Some poems in *Death of a Naturalist* transcend this Hughesian submissiveness before nature. In "Digging," for example, Heaney likens his poetic "digging" to that of his farmer father. The poet wants to show certain affinities between his work and his father's; and yet, Heaney also hopes to reveal how far he has come from his father's provincial world. "Digging" is about resistance—that of a young poet who defies his family in order to escape a debilitating environment.

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In "Follower," Heaney's father emerges again to pester the poet for his desertion. "[T]oday," Heaney writes at the end of the poem, "It is my father who keeps stumbling / Behind me, and will not go away."

"Digging" and "Follower" have been included in *Selected Poems, 1966-1987.* Another one salvaged from *Death of a Naturalist* is "Personal Helicon." This poem is even more frankly self-referential than either "Digging" or "Follower." In this poem, Heaney confesses that he is a "big-eyed Narcissus" who rhymes "to see myself, to set the darkness echoing." This will become the poet's main interest, once he shakes the spell of Hughes: to see himself, not only as an artist manipulating the world ("to set the darkness echoing"), but as the at times guilt-ridden scrutinizer of his own self-imposed isolation.

The poems in *Door into the Dark* repudiate even more the example of Hughes. In "Night Drive," for instance, the natural world is no longer so callous and unmerciful. In fact it is benign, even nurturing:

> The smells of ordinariness
> Were new on the night drive through France:
> Rain and hay and woods on the air
> Made warm draughts in the open car.
>
> Signposts whitened relentlessly.
> Montreuil, Abbéville, Beauvais
> Were promised, promised, came and went,
> Each place granting its name's fulfilment.
>
> A combine groaning its way late
> Bled seeds across its work-light.
> A forest fire smouldered out.
> One by one small cafés shut.
>
> I thought of you continuously
> A thousand miles south where Italy
> Laid its loin to France on the darkened sphere.
> Your ordinariness was renewed there.

"Night Drive" also shows the presence of an active poetic intelligence. This intelligence is what links the "new" ordinariness apprehended on the drive in France with the ordinariness the poet imagines being renewed a thousand miles north. Far from putting himself at nature's mercy, Heaney in "Night Drive" manipulates nature for his own purposes. In so doing, he is a thousand miles "north" of the mental inertia that is so conspicuous a feature of some of Heaney's early, Hughes-derived poems.

Heaney's next book, *Wintering Out*, was seen by one critic, Blake Morrison, as a kind of political watershed for Heaney. Morrison, the author of a 1982 book on the poet, argues that the poet chose the path of politics after being stung by a 1969 review of *Door into the Dark*. (Christopher Ricks, the reviewer, called Heaney "the poet of muddy-booted blackberry picking.") Heaney's new political direction, writes Morrison, was also prompted by the riots and political violence in the late 1960s in Derry and Belfast, where Heaney was then living.

To support his claim of Heaney's new political involvement, Morrison cannot cite any poems, for there are none, at least not in *Wintering Out*. He admits: "Nor would it be true to say that the poems of *Wintering Out* are explicitly 'about' what Heaney lived through in Belfast in the late 1960s." Where, then, is proof of Heaney's shift of political heart? Morrison finds it in a single propaganda piece that Heaney wrote during this time (but which he didn't put his name to and never reprinted), and in a 1974 lecture entitled "Feeling into Words," included in *Preoccupations*. The critical sentence from this lecture reads:

> From that moment [the summer of 1969] the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament.

Even this, however, is ambiguous. Is the predicament to which Heaney refers that of Ireland, as Morrison contends, or that of the poet and other imaginative writers at a time of crisis? It is not clear. However, even if it is the Irish political crisis to which Heaney is alluding, it is not self-evident that the "images and symbols" that the poet finds "adequate"

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to the emergency will be explicitly or one-dimensionally political.

What most of the poetry in *Wintering Out* is "explicit" about, if anything, is what Heaney once referred to as the "erotic mouth-music" of certain Irish place-names: "Broagh," "Anahorish," and "Toome." Reading "A New Song" is enough to convince anyone that the poet's principal aesthetic ambition during these years was nothing more than the desire to relish these sounds:

> I met a girl from Derrygarve
> And the name, a lost potent musk,
> Recalled the river's long swerve,
> A kingfisher's blue bolt at dusk
>
> And stepping stones like black molars
> Sunk in the ford, the shifty glaze
> Of the whirlpool, the Moyola
> Pleasuring beneath alder trees.
>
> And Derrygarve, I thought, was just:
> Vanished music, twilit water—
> A smooth libation of the past
> Poured by this chance vestal daughter.
>
> But now our river tongues must rise
> From licking deep in native haunts
> To flood, with vowelling embrace,
> Demesnes staked out in consonants.
>
> And Castledawson we'll enlist
> And Upperlands, each planted bawn—
> Like bleaching-greens resumed by grass—
> A vocable, as rath and bullaun.

What Heaney was also relying on in the poems of this period are images of excavations in what he called, in "Toome" (also from *Wintering Out*), Ireland's "alluvial mud," with its "loam, flints, musket-balls." Morrison argues that such imagery amounts to some kind of political statement by the poet. And yet, it is just as easy to conclude that Heaney's images of excavations and burrowings into the water-logged earth reflect a wish for political avoidance, not confrontation.

Images of delving into the earth turn up in the group of "bog poems" that appeared in *Wintering Out* and *North*. In these poems, Heaney takes as his subject-matter the centuries-old victims of religious persecution and tribal warfare whose bodies had been exhumed from the peat-bogs of Ireland and Denmark. Heaney's source for the poems, evidently, was *The Bog People*, a book by the Danish archaeologist P. V. Glob. Glob's study, which appeared in translation in 1969, contained photographs of the remarkably well-preserved corpses.

In "Punishment," Heaney ponders the fate of one of the bog people: an adulteress who was shaven, blindfolded, and executed for her crime:

> I can feel the tug
> of the halter at the nape
> of her neck, the wind
> on her naked front.
>
> It blows her nipples
> to amber beads,
> it shakes the frail rigging
> of her ribs.
>
> I can see her drowned
> body in the bog,
> the weighing stone,
> the floating rods and boughs.
>
> Under which at first
> she was a barked sapling
> that is dug up
> oak-bone, brain-firkin:
>
> her shaved head
> like a stubble of black corn,
> her blindfold a soiled bandage,
> her noose a ring
>
> to store
> the memories of love.
> Little adulteress,
> before they punished you
>
> you were flaxen-haired,
> undernourished, and your

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tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

No doubt Heaney wishes to suggest that tribal hatred, such as that which his country was then engulfed by (and continues to be engulfed by), is as old as time. This alone makes "Punishment" more relevant to the Irish Troubles than many of Heaney's other poems. All the same, in referring to the past rather than the present, Heaney seemed determined to reject the expectations of his fellow Irish, especially those who wanted rallying cries and propaganda. In "Digging" and "Follower," Heaney had dashed the expectations of his family. In "Punishment," he dashes those of his larger "family" of Ireland.

However, it is not just Heaney's interest in ancient victims of violence that makes "Punishment" so powerful an expression of political denial. "Punishment," like "Digging" and "Follower," gives Heaney the opportunity to examine his own "fate" of coercion and intimidation. When Heaney writes, "I can feel the tug / of the halter at the nape / of her neck," he is not kidding. Both artist and model, in this poem, have felt the "tug" of their communities; both, in their denials, have profaned and insulted them.

Robert Frost once observed that good metaphors suggest not only the resemblances between disparate things, but the limits of those resemblances, as well. It was Frost's notion that a good metaphor permits the reader to judge how faithful its proposed correspondence is. The conceit governing "Punishment" is of the kind that Frost appreciated. For how accurate is adultery, after all, to describe the level of the poet's guilt? Not all that accurate. The poet's dwelling on the past may be *compared* quite arrestingly with an adulterer's act, but it cannot, in the end, be *equated* with it. Heaney's analogy concedes its own limits; and this poet, at least, shows himself to be more responsible to reality and the truth than a roomful of political commentators.

Some poems in *North* are more politically explicit than "Punishment." Most of these, however, have not been included in *Selected Poems, 1966-1987*. There are a few, sporadic images of violence and war in Heaney's next book, *Field Work*. But this volume too is free, for the most part, not only of the imagery of violence, but some of the guilt that was so pervasive a feature of *North*. What caused this, no doubt, was Heaney's decision to move his family, in July of 1972, out of Belfast and Northern Ireland for good. In fact, the cover of *Field Work* shows the map of Heaney's place of escape: Glanmore, County Wicklow, in the Republic of Ireland. The poet lived here for four years, writing the poems that would be included in *Field Work*.

The "Glanmore Sonnets" show particularly well Heaney's new relaxed and expansive mood. In these sonnets, the poet is again able to savor the countryside for itself. No longer does he view the land as something to be tunneled into in an attempt to evade his many implorers:

Dogger, Rockall, Malin, Irish Sea:
Green, swift upsurges, North Atlantic flux
Conjured by that strong gale-warning voice,
Collapse into a sibilant penumbra.
Midnight and closedown. Sirens of the tundra,
Of eel-road, seal-road, keel-road, whale-road,
raise
Their wind-compounded keen behind the baize

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> And drive the trawlers to the lee of Wicklow.
> *L'Etoile*, *Le Guillemot*, *La Belle Hélène*
> Nursed their bright names this morning in the bay
> That toiled like mortar. It was marvellous
> And actual, I said out loud, 'A haven,'
> The word deepening, clearing, like a sky
> Elsewhere on Minches, Cromarty, The Faroes.

This is Heaney at his best: the rough attributes of the landscape made "real" in a poetic language that is itself rugged and thoroughly purged of poetic adornment and cliché. Heaney's language is accurately "keyed and pitched" (his words) to the poet's sensibility, which itself has been rather roughly hewn in a long struggle for survival.

Heaney's next book, *Sweeney Astray*, is a translation of *Buile Suibhne*, a medieval Irish work. To the casual observer, Heaney's decision to retrieve a fairly obscure poetic text from Irish history would seem to oppose his modernistic, at times pugnaciously anti-Irish, perspective. And yet, in the story of Mad Sweeney, who was cursed by a saint and forced to live as a bird-man wandering the trees, Heaney found, as he wrote in the introduction,

> a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance. . . . [The story of Sweeney illustrates] the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political, and domestic obligation.

The poet identifies with Sweeney, in short, because the mad King, like the murdered girl with whom the poet empathized in "Punishment," was condemned by his community. However, unlike the murdered adulteress, who had no chance to make a better life, Sweeney discovers spiritual sustenance outside of the social community from which he has been banished. Sweeney, much in the manner of the emotionally enervated poet who arrived in County Wicklow in 1972, finds solace in the elements.

The limpid and beautiful "songs" of the roaming Sweeney are arguably as much Heaney's as they are his:

> I prefer the elusive
> rhapsody of blackbirds
> to the garrulous blather
> of men and women.
>
> I prefer the squeal of badgers
> in their sett
> to the tally-ho
> of the morning hunt.
>
> I prefer the re-
> echoing belling of a stag
> among the peaks
> to that arrogant horn.

In the title poem of *Station Island*, the poet again resorts to legend and myth to explore the nature of the poet's work. Following Dante, Heaney's twelve-poem sequence contains an account of an imagined, penitential journey. Heaney's note on "Station Island" reads, in part:

> 'Station Island' is set upon an island of that name in Lough Derg. . . . For centuries it has been the site of a pilgrimage which involves fasting, praying, and going barefoot around the 'beds'—stone circles believed to be the remaining foundations of early monastic buildings. Each unit of these penitential exercises is called a 'station'.

During Heaney's "penitential exercise," he meets various figures from Irish history, among them William Carleton, a nineteenth century writer who made the pilgrimage to Lough Derg in his youth; Patrick Kavanagh, the Irish poet who died in 1967; and James Joyce. The most accusing of these spirits is Colum McCartney, the poet's murdered cousin. He rebukes Heaney for having "confused evasion and artistic tact." "[You] saccharined my death," McCartney states, "with morning dew."

These are powerful accusations, but they are not the whole story. In the twelfth poem of the sequence, the spirit of James Joyce materializes to give his view of the responsibilities of the writer. Don't try to alter yourself to suit the world, Joyce's ghost advises.

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In fact, the spirit says:

> 'You lose more of yourself than you redeem
> doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.
> When they make the circle wide, it's time to
> swim
>
> out on your own and fill the element
> with signatures on your own frequency,
> echo-soundings, searches, probes, allurements,
>
> elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea.'

If we had any doubt regarding with whom Heaney sides in this debate, McCartney or Joyce, we need only read *The Haw Lantern*, Heaney's most recent book. In "Clearances" especially, the poet's long elegy for his mother, there is much evidence that he still favors Joyce over McCartney.

Indeed, if Heaney *were* uncertain about himself and his obligations as a poet, he might conceivably use the occasion of his mother's death for some kind of sentimental and inauthentic "return" to the world he long ago left behind—the world whose petitions and beseechings he has spent the better part of his life denying. However, there is nothing in the least bit bogus, sentimental, or artistically compromised about this "return." In fact, the seventh poem of the sequence contains yet another of Heaney's refusals—this one directed at his mother. The poet admits, in the poem, that while she was alive she had the power to govern his "tongue," at least while he was in her presence. But the disobedient son refuses to allow her to govern the "tongue" of his poems—not even his elegy for her:

> Fear of affectation made her affect
> Inadequacy whenever it came to
> Pronouncing words 'beyond her'. *Bertold Brek.*
> She'd manage something hampered and askew
> Every time, as if she might betray
> The hampered and inadequate by too
> Well-adjusted a vocabulary.
> With more challenge than pride, she'd tell me,
> 'You
> know all them things.' So I governed my tongue
> In front of her, a genuinely well-
> Adjusted adequate betrayal
> Of what I knew better. I'd *naw* and *aye*
> And decently relapse into the wrong
> Grammar which kept us allied and at bay.

For over twenty years, Heaney's ambition as a poet has been to express his refusals in poems that simultaneously validate other aspects of that world. This ambition is especially well realized in "Clearances." This sonnet sequence thus provides an ideal conclusion to the fruitful middle phase of Heaney's remarkable career.

Shorter notices

Mario Vargas Llosa A Writer's Reality. Edited, with an introduction, by Myron I. Lichtblau. Syracuse University Press, 164 pages, $24.95

Mario Vargas Llosa has set about the Latin American literary task—to portray the collision of indigenous and Enlightenment-influenced cultures—with a rare combination of daring and common sense. In *A Writer's Reality* we see it is this combination that makes his novels scintillating without leaving the reader stranded in metafictional abstractions, and that allows him to delve into racial difference without patronizing the humble native, or, indeed, anyone else.

A Writer's Reality consists of what appear to be barely altered transcriptions of lectures the Peruvian author gave at Syracuse University in 1988. As such, it is a much more repetitive and meandering book than it should have been. Yet even unsmoothed by an editor, it adds up to a satisfying literary manifesto. Two initial chapters on New World history and letters are followed by six chapters on six of Vargas Llosa's ten novels, each chapter a window on the writer's artistic intentions and the technical refinements he devised to try to achieve them.

Vargas Llosa has been known to cut an iconoclastic swath through the contemporary scene, and here he does not disappoint.

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But even as he slams the *nouveau roman* in art and Marxist utopianism in politics, a theme keeps popping up that ties him firmly to the South American tradition: the distortions that can happen when Western ideas and institutions are imported into South America.

As he gathered novelistic material on trips into Peru's jungle interior, Vargas Llosa saw the two "Westernizing" institutions there—the military and the Catholic Church—doing harm when none was intended. An outpost of nuns that sequestered village girls in order to civilize and catechize them was in fact creating a class of bicultural misfits who drifted to the coastal capital of Lima for work as maids or prostitutes. This phenomenon is captured in *The Green House* (1966), inspired by a real-life brothel that fascinated the author in his youth. In turn, the jungle army garrisons that imported prostitutes from Lima became the subject of comedy in *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* (1972). The "special visitors" to the forts never serviced the tribal villagers, making the villagers jealous of the government-sent military men. "By creating [the service], the army solved one problem but created another," writes Vargas Llosa in a characteristically simple statement that summarizes a good deal of his work.

Yet he rejects the prevailing elite Latin American view that the West, through its original and latter-day (*yanqui*) conquistadors, is the root of all evil. He blames not Western ideas but the way Latin elites themselves have absorbed and misused them. Instead of indicting the Spaniards "for what they did to the Indians," he writes, "we must remember that [in many of these] countries . . . it was during the Republic (in the nineteenth century), not during the colony, that the native cultures were systematically exterminated." *The War of the End of the World* (1984) is a novelistic treatment of a bizarre case in point. It depicts civil war between Brazil's young republican government—infected by Comtian positivism through the influence of Benjamin Constant, who taught at a Rio military school—and a group of impoverished converts to a Capuchin sect that believed all products of the Enlightenment, including representative government, were the Antichrist.

To handle these themes Vargas Llosa works under formal principles that are simple enough, at least in the telling. The two technical elements for him are the narrator and time. One should be innovative with both, he believes, because "literature, in order to persuade and convince the reader, must become a sovereign world, independent, a world that has emancipated itself from its mother, from reality."

But innovations are permissible only insofar as they serve the substance of the novel. Vargas Llosa describes his working pattern: his first draft gives free rein to his taste for formal originality; subsequent go-rounds inevitably find him scaling back his ambitions out of a concern to throw a life buoy of comprehensibility to the reader. Thus *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (1977), on one level a cryptic case study of the disintegration of writer Pedro Camacho's mind, contains a later-added "pedestrian" level based on the novelist's life, that of "Marito" and his much older lady-love. This grounding in the need to "convince" and "persuade" (his two artistic watchwords) and otherwise bring the reader along with him sets Vargas Llosa apart from all that is self-indulgent in modern fiction.

—*Lauren Weiner*

Jonathan Yardley Out of Step: Notes from a Purple Decade. Villard, 264 pages, $20

Jonathan Yardley has a superfine nose for hypocrisy, absurdity, self-delusion, and self-indulgence. That he takes delight in exposing these vices, especially when secreted away in artifacts of our so-called literary culture, is well known to followers of his work as a book critic and, since 1981, as a Monday-morning columnist for *The Washington Post*. *Out of Step* is Yardley's choice of the best of his column, a thousand-word feature that, by his own account, has "evolved into a place for

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commentary on issues not often addressed in newspaper opinion sections," including "education both higher and lower, the press and the media, [and] the ebb and flow of American social life." The column's primary focus, however, has been on those "literary and book-industry matters that transcend a book reviewer's business," especially fakes and faddists and over-sized egos—i.e, matters involving *personalities.* If it's the critic's duty to appraise the pots, it's the columnist's pleasure to take pot shots at the potters, and when Yardley is at the top of his form, his aim is deadly.

Those who despise Yardley complain that his aim pulls to the left, and it's true, hilariously true. Yardley is a reader of the old-fashioned sort who believes, in the words of old-fashioned writer Robert Ward, that "the novelist's real job [is] creating a fictional world that reflects true, lived experience." This immediately puts Yardley "out of step" with the current critical consensus, which holds that the novelist's job is to effect social change. Among the best of the columns collected here are those devoted to certain mouthpieces for the consensus—Norman Mailer, William Styron, Toni Morrison, and Mary McCarthy. Yardley quotes McCarthy as having lately said, in regard to the political novel, "Americans, I think, tend to get their political education through fiction—occasionally through poetry, though this is becoming rarer." Yardley is quick to point out that McCarthy wasn't really talking about the American electorate in general, but that tiny elite, comprising far less than 1 percent of the population, that reads trendy political fiction. "But then," continues Yardley,

> McCarthy was never really talking about the real world Out There. She was talking about the little world of the literati, in which if you close your eyes, take a deep breath and make a wish you can actually convince yourself that E. L. Doctorow and Joseph Heller are political figures of stature and influence. From there it is just a short distance—why, no more than a baby step—to persuading yourself that Doctorow and Heller, not to mention Arthur Miller and Philip Roth and all the other guardians of the literary conscience, are the real shapers of American political thought. And from there, who knows where you can go? So long as you keep your eyes closed, you can go anywhere at all.

And go they do, the literati—and go they always will, hand in hand with red-hot New York book editors, publicity-bought reviewers, MLA conventioneers, and all the other targets of these columns. Nothing Yardley writes could ever get them to open their eyes, but perhaps that isn't the point. He opens the eyes of the rest of us and makes us laugh, and the laughter is especially tonic for the many old-fashioned readers still Out There.

—*Christopher Carduff*

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

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Popova at MOMA *by Deborah Rosenthal*
Alexandre Dumas *by Renee Winegarten*

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Notebook

"Salmagundi": the P is silent

by James Bowman

In the British satirical magazine *Private Eye*, there is a regular column entitled "Pseuds Corner." What, exactly, it means for a writer to be a pseud in *Private Eye*'s terms it is not easy to explain. Certainly it may involve pretension, pomposity, vanity, circumlocution, name-dropping, fashionable thinking, fine writing, and, above all, self-importance, although none of these qualities by itself may be enough. There must also be an obvious disproportion, sometimes comic, sometimes pathetic, between the writer's ambition and his achievement, between largeness of theme and smallness of material.

It helps if there is also an *ad hominem* element. Any painter, for example, who said "Some artists paint flowers; I paint what the flower is thinking" would be a pseud, but pseudery in this case is raised to a higher power since the painter is Sylvester Stallone. It would be merely anodyne for an ordinary person to make a Christmas wish for "a shining star to lead the rich and privileged people of the world to the realization that they must share their wealth with the hungry and the sick" and so confer upon themselves a gift "more precious than the most expensive Christmas present in Harrods," but it is pseudery in the mouth of the chairman of Harrods.

Yet it is possible for any writer, almost by inadvertence, to join the ranks of the pseuds, as does this unsuspecting contributor to the *Antiques Trade Gazette*:

> Titled *La Réponse Imprevue*, the signed painting, dated 1936, shows the artist experimenting with the concept of a door, its function contradicted by its being closeable thus obstructing passage through it.

In America we value our democratic right to talk nonsense, but we have no exact equivalent to the pseud. His identification and persecution depend on a British, public-school ethos whose philistinism is the regrettable corollary of its value as a last-ditch defense of modesty and good taste. The lack of it in America leaves us naked and defenseless against a Ted Turner, who sees no disproportion in comparing himself with Moses, or a Bartlett Giamatti, whose ludicrously overwritten baseball prose takes the bathetic to new depths.

But if American writers lived in constant fear of finding their most carefully wrought *jeux d'esprit* on display in Pseuds Corner, we might not ever have arrived at the happy occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Salmagundi*.[1] This splendidly erudite and worthy quarterly out of Skidmore College even offers, in a great American tradition, intellectual asylum to such overseas pseuds as George Steiner or Gabriel Josipovici—men in danger of persecution by fellow writers in their home countries but who can be sure that they will get a respectful hearing here.

1 *Salmagundi: A Quarterly of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, No. 88-89, Fall 1990-Winter 1991, $10.

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It is important to understand that the pseud can be, like Steiner or Josipovici, a thinker or artist of the first rank at the same time as he is, perhaps luckily, too much isolated from the community of discourse among his contemporaries to have a sure sense of his own limitations. The contributions of both to this double, anniversary issue of *Salmagundi* are well worth reading; they even manage to avoid all but the occasional lapse into pseudery. But they remind us of the scope afforded by American intellectual life to pseuds who have not been made circumspect by the hard school of skepticism and ridicule.

Where else in the world, for example, could we expect to see an essay like that offered here by the San Francisco writer Daniel Harris on "Baby Talk"? Harris first disarmingly confesses that he himself has been guilty of indulging in this "intense and fetishistic practice" and wonders why, "in an age in which people feel free to air every vice and personal failing before perfect strangers in casual and public situations, baby talk remains something about which the most immodest nurturer of intrapersonal relationships is ashamed." Then, having spotted an opening, he proceeds to go for the last taboo himself. Alas, his observations are neither titillating nor instructive but merely banal and politically tendentious. Baby talk, it seems, is "a repository of reactionary beliefs about love" partaking of "our culture's view of relationships as utterly disarming and preemptive emotional experiences, of such stormy irrationality that they reduce us to children." It leads to "regressive foreplay" which "eroticizes the inequalities of power implicit in gender."

And so on. Almost every page of this essay turns up splendid occasions for the pseud:

> Discussions of art and the history of ideas have revolved around the rise and fall of various sensibilities—the naturalism of Zola; the romanticism of Byron; the decadence of Huysmans and Wilde . . . or even the futuristic aesthetic of Art Deco . . . Little attention has been given, however, to an aesthetic as pervasive and, in the long run, as prepossessing as all of these various sensibilities taken as a whole: the aesthetic of the cute.

Curious, isn't it? Yet, for all this rich material, where do we in America find a focus for the ridicule it so richly deserves? Against what universally recognized standard do we measure it and find it wanting? The more than five hundred pages of this issue of *Salmagundi* are like the Klondike before gold or Arabia before oil was discovered: a rich repository of pseudery which we lack the moral and aesthetic technology to exploit.

Consider a few of my favorite examples. There is, for one, a vastly over-written stream of apocalyptic consciousness called "Exile" by William Gass—whose name, it turns out, has a double significance:

> We number ourselves now in billions, a profusion so dangerous that were we, all told, to fart in unison, we would windsweep and poison the world; and were one to strike a match to such a methane-colored cloud . . . boom would not be the half of it.

Or, from the same effusion:

> The operation of doorknobs is inexplicable. Doorknobs ought to be easy. We only expect bidets to be mysterious. But as alienation settles over our souls like a fog, features, operations, relations, without actually altering, offer us different points of reference, their aims shift, their essences dissolve.

Mary Gordon in "Some Things I Saw" is never more pretentious than when she pretends to think it pretentious of her to have come to see Abel Gance's *Napoleon* at Radio City: "For all its grandeur, there's no serious pretentiousness about Radio City, which is why it's the perfect place for me to see *Napoleon*, the 'classic' I have so pretentiously come to see."

There is a preemptive quality to this self-accusation: the pseud is insecure in her own pseudery and so pleads guilty to a lesser charge. It does not work. The falseness of the

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pose is patent, as when she goes on to parade her own sensitivity to the appalling example of Andy Warhol:

> I start talking about him obsessively. I bore everyone talking about the end of the 19th century. Which I've just discovered (March 1989). I fall into depression, a depression that makes me want to stop writing. Literally contemplate taking my novel back from the publisher. I am ashamed of everything I have done. It is not of my time. It's a lie, a pathetic one, because I didn't realize I was lying . . .

Poor Mary Gordon! Can we bear the pain of her own self-abnegation? Ah well, at least she seems bravely to have continued to write anyway.

Lynne Sharon Schwartz in "True Confessions of a Reader" combines Zen Buddhism, baseball (O Giamatti, thou shouldst be living at this hour!), and reading in an infallible recipe for pseudishness:

> Then one evening—the turning point—I sat down, committing my body to the chair, my eyes to the screen, my soul to the national Oversoul. . . . The fortunes of the Mets, as well as the fluctuations of each individual Met, had come to matter. It was partly proximity, the *sine qua non* of most love, and partly aesthetics. When giraffe-like Darryl Strawberry lazily unfurled an arm to allow a fly ball to nestle in his glove, I felt the elation I used to feel watching André Eglevsky leap and stay aloft so long it seemed he had forgotten what he owed to gravity. Not unlike the elation I got from books.

Her piece is far too long and self-indulgent, but the pseud in Lynne Sharon Schwartz could have been surgically removed by a good editor with a firm hand who might have encouraged her to tell what is really a very interesting story of childhood reading without allowing her the luxury of her bathetic self-doubt:

> Was I living, I wondered when I first read [*The Ambassadors*], or simply reading? Were books the world, or at least a world? How could I "live" when there was so much to read that ten lives could not be enough? And what is it, anyway, this "living"? Have I ever done it?

Why is she asking us? Because it is a kind of self-validation, a testimony to her authenticity to ask the question at all, and especially to pose it in this conversational prose that sounds like talking to herself: if we overhear her thinking, we cannot think her false or artificial; we might be restrained from calling her a pseud.

Pseud-anxiety, we see, plagues her even though she is only occasionally pseudish and unlikely to be detected under the cover of *Salmagundi* in any case. Nevertheless, that artistic conscience shows there is hope for her. The same, I fear, cannot be said for Rudolf Arnheim, who is the most perfect and enjoyable kind of pseud: a completely unselfconscious one. Marvelously titled, his "Snippets and Seeds" (Eighteenth Installment!) is a little collection of pensées so perfected in their pseudery that they render comment superfluous:

> All my life I have been accustomed to letting any woman enter the door before me. This polite habit is more than a gesture since it also hands her the authority for whatever action will be initiated beyond the door, be it in a store or restaurant or in a private home. It is a concession to matriarchy to which the abiding gentleman may or may not want to acquiesce.

> The German social philosopher Kurt Riezler had inherited from his father-in-law, the painter Max Liebermann, a Degas painting of four ballerinas, classically beautiful like a Parthenon frieze and now, I believe, in the Cleveland Museum. In his apartment on Riverside Drive in New York he had the painting hanging in front of him above his desk. "When I am writing," he told me, "I sometimes look at the painting and I say to myself: Couldn't I make this sentence a bit more concise?"

> Years ago when I arrived for a lecture at Maharishi University I was greeted in the usual

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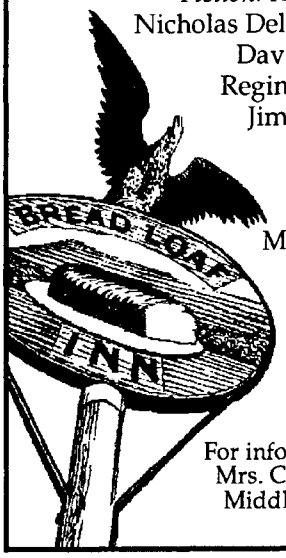

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motel room by a single red carnation in a vase with a note from the students and faculty welcoming me to the University. I have not forgotten this silent but so human reception.

Salmagundi poetry provides better camouflage for the pseud than its prose does. Its density and ambiguity and, often, obscurity allow the poets to lose themselves in their thickets of imagery. Only infrequently does a line like Carl Dennis's "Today I seem to be real as I stop for groceries" rise up off the page like a rocketing pheasant of the pseudish. It therefore seems very unfair that poor Stephen Sandy, who honorably breaks cover with an honest to God narrative about his having, at age eighteen, met Robert Frost, should have fallen at once into an almost Arnheimian mode. His account has all the breathless, gee-whiz quality that one would expect from an eighteen-year-old, which may be his excuse for not knowing any better now that he is presumably quite a lot older. Frost is allowed to say to him, portentously, "I've got the salad from my garden" as "Behind him in the shade toddled John Berryman." Then, when Berryman asks the great man whatever happened to William Empson,

> . . . Frost
> Hung fire, some of us thinking how Empson was
> At work in England that very minute, when
> At length Frost drew the hand that held his glass
> Along the sofa's back toward John and looked him
> In the eye and said, "some of us pass by."

Good counsel! Let us, too, pass by further illustration in order to ask ourselves why it is that American writers, in particular, are beset with the temptation to pseudery? I think it is because American intellectual life is such a cozy little self-contained world. Preciousness is always fostered among those, like the Bloomsburies (who are obviously very big with the *Salmagundi* set), served by a private language of style and allusion—those who

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have taught themselves to see the rest of the world as philistine and of comparatively blunt sensibilities.

You can see this too in its politics. In the book under review, even poor Lynne Sharon Schwartz cannot forbear to animadvert upon Reaganomics in the course of finding Elbert Hubbard's inspirational classic, *A Message to Garcia*, crypto-fascist. The straightforwardly political pieces here range from Norman Birnbaum's "How New the New Germany?" (Part I!), which attempts to stem the tide of revisionist history by demonstrating that East Germany was really social democratic all along, to Cornelius Castoriadis's "The Pulverization of Marxism-Leninism," which attempts etc. by proving that *Marxism* was really social democratic all along. Some of us pass by.

But we must be alert along the way for the suspect political agenda to be found, too, in such seemingly out of the way places as Charles Molesworth's piece "On Popular Culture." Molesworth, a member of the magazine's editorial board, arrives, by way of an attack upon the complicity of pop culture with capitalism, at the unsurprising conclusion that "the main political problem of our age continues to be the problem of scale, and the need to imagine and implement a humane socialism that can function effectively at a world level without succumbing to oligarchic corruption." Quite a problem it is, too!

Interestingly, the regular columnists at the front of the book are better, on the whole, than the other contributors. One of them, Christopher Lasch, even has good things to say about Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* before he characteristically goes off the deep end with an assault upon "corporate control," which, he believes, is really what has corrupted education. Martin Jay acknowledges, from the left, that "with all of its flaws, what the left used to sneer at as 'bourgeois democracy' has shown itself more resilient and responsive to the needs of its constituency, or at least large chunks of it, than other alternatives."

Maybe there is hope for the little world of the *Salmagundi*ans after all; maybe they will begin to feel real not just as they stop for groceries but as they apply their pens to the gleaning of their teeming brains. Certainly, although I have concentrated on the pseudery, there are good things here too: In addition to Josipovici's story (together with a very considerate note) "The Big Glass," Steiner's discussion of race, nationality, and religion in "Totem or Taboo," and about half of Lynne Sharon Schwartz, there is an excellent essay on Frost by Seamus Heaney and a reasonable if overstated and jargony one on *Julius Caesar* by René Girard; there are good to very good poems by Heaney, Charles Edward Eaton, Alfred Corn, Barry Goldensohn, and W. D. Snodgrass and a minor but pleasing short story by Nadine Gordimer; John Peck has translated and commented on a poem by Rudolf Borchardt and J. M. Coetzee has written an excellent essay on Zbigniew Herbert and censorship.

If that list of the quality stuff seems a little overloaded with foreigners, it should be a reminder of our American disease: a lack of perspective on the claims of the tyrannical self posing as authorial persona. In the next twenty-five years I hope that the American intellectual may learn to laugh at the pseud in himself, for only thus will he ever stop being one.

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Letters

More poems for young people

To the Editors:
Robert Phillips states in his letter (February 1991) that Marya Zaturenska in "Visiting the Gregorys" (September 1990) concluded that *The Golden Journey: Poems for Young People*, which Louise Bogan and I compiled, was an "imitation" of *The Crystal Cabinet: An Invitation to Poetry*, compiled by the Gregorys, not because we plundered its contents but because we had copied its format, its subtitle, and its use of woodcut illustrations. That conclusion, absurd as it is, cannot go unanswered.

We made no claim to originality for the subtitle of *The Golden Journey*; it had been used many times before, as had the subtitle of the Gregorys' book, and simply indicated the audience for which the book was intended. Woodcuts have appeared as illustrations since the earliest publication of children's books, and our choice of Fritz Kredel, a modern master of the woodcut, owed nothing whatever to the Gregorys. Indeed, Louise Bogan's contempt for the Gregorys was such that she would not have looked at *The Crystal Cabinet* even if I had placed it in front of her. The fact is that we did not look at that book. We did not take it up, we did not put it down; we did not glance at its dust jacket, its title page, its subtitle, or its contents. We did not examine it, we did not imitate it. Marya Zaturenska's conclusion that we did is vicious, absurd, and totally wrong.

William Jay Smith
New York, NY

Brecht and Döblin

To the Editors:
I read John Simon's essay on Brecht in his letters ("The Amoral Superman," December 1990) with great interest. But since Mr. Simon is a stickler for accuracy, I would like to call to his attention that the appellation of Alfred Döblin as "the Marxist novelist" is an oversimplification. While it is true that Döblin embraced Marxism after World War I, the record also shows that he did so in a highly unorthodox and free-wheeling manner. After his conversion to Catholicism in 1941, Döblin's work reflects a radical break with Marxism and a pronounced interest in Christian mysticism and religious renewal (cf. *Der unsterbliche Mensch*, 1946). His frank criticism of atheism and clericalism, neo-capitalism and Marxist orthodoxy made him an outsider in either part of Germany to which he returned in 1945 after spending most of the war years in the United States. Since according to Mr. Simon, Döblin remained Brecht's "life-long friend," I would have liked to hear what Brecht had to say about Döblin's break with Marxism and his subsequent conversion.

Franz Schneider
Professor of English and
Comparative Literature
Gonzaga University
Spokane, WA

John Simon replies:
There is only so much Döblin one can put into a review of Brecht's letters. It is the Marxist Döblin

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who was closely linked with Brecht, not the later Catholic convert. The crucial incident that could have scuttled the relationship—when the proselyte Döblin insulted both Brecht, who was giving him a birthday tribute, and all the other German émigré writers and artists in Los Angeles who participated or attended—is described by Brecht in the *Arbeits Journal* for August 14, 1943, and in the poem "Peinlicher Vorsall." That Brecht did not break off with Döblin completely is a very rare example of Brechtian forbearance without political motivation.

"The New Shostakovich"

To the Editors:

In his review of Ian MacDonald's book *The New Shostakovich* (February 1991), Samuel Lipman ends by examining what he rightly considers a very important problem: "What are we to make of art created under totalitarianism?" He considers this with particular reference to the great works of Prokofiev and Shostakovich that were composed under high Stalinism. He writes, however, as though such works were written *despite* Stalinist tyranny and does not consider the possibility which I am strongly inclined to believe is true: these works could be written precisely *because of* Stalinism. These two composers, whose youthful works are in comparison emotionally very thin stuff, were able to reach the emotional depth that their later great works exhibit precisely because of the suffering which they themselves had to undergo and which they saw all around them. The same is true in literature: the best works of the Russian dissidents make most of our so-called literature seem childish in comparison. The great art and, perhaps even more important, the great moral teachings which such evil inspires do not remotely justify it, but they are, to some extent, a compensation. Mankind will remember what was happening in Stalinist Russia when our merchant republic will be long forgotten.

Donald F. McCabe
School of Historical Studies
The Institute for Advanced Study
Princeton, NJ

Samuel Lipman replies:

Donald F. McCabe and I might well agree that the human spirit can triumph over even the greatest human evil, and use the suffering that evil causes to create that triumph. This transcendence is possible in art, as it is possible in life. So far, so good. But Mr. McCabe goes on to end his letter with, I think, a wholly unjustified slam at what I presume he sees as the superficiality of capitalism and the bourgeoisie: "Mankind," he writes, "will remember what was happening in Stalinist Russia when our merchant republic will be forgotten." Mr. McCabe's pejorative use of the phrase "merchant republic" ignores the fact that nineteenth-century music, surely one of the greatest achievements of civilization, is coeval with the rise of capitalism and the bourgeoisie that by implication he denigrates.

Art can exist under any form of government, and it can also fail under any form of government. Social systems do not exist for art, any more than art exists for social systems. Though they are often related, they each have their own tasks, and their own existence.

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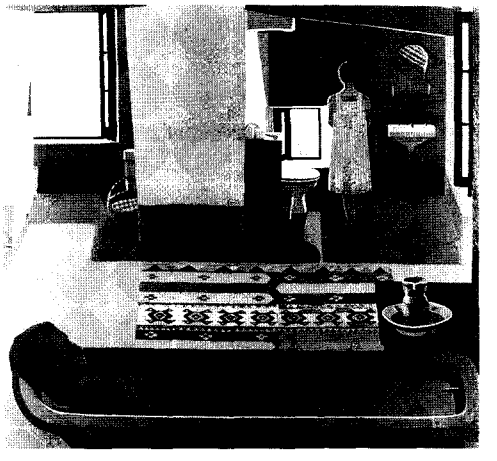

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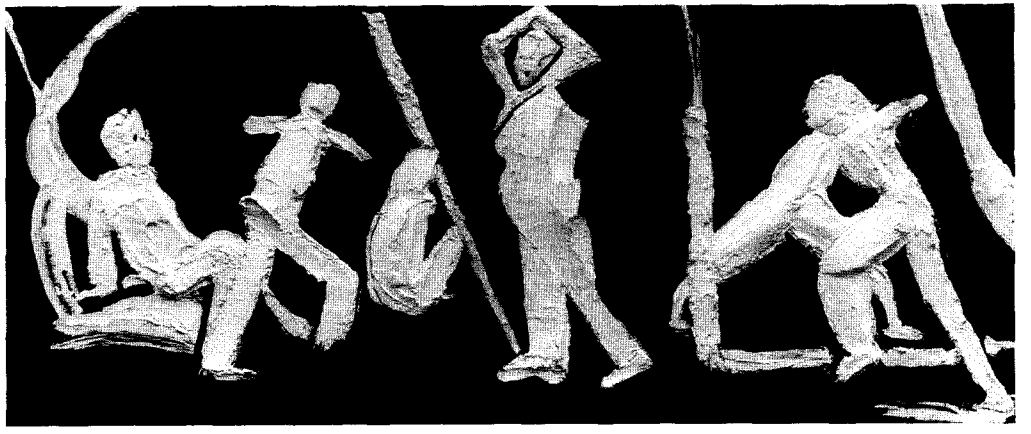

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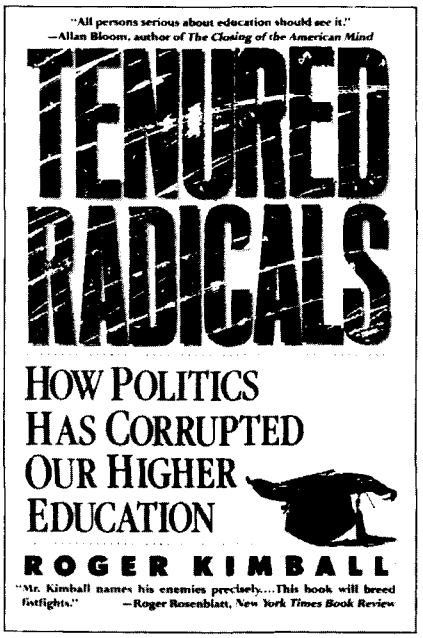
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